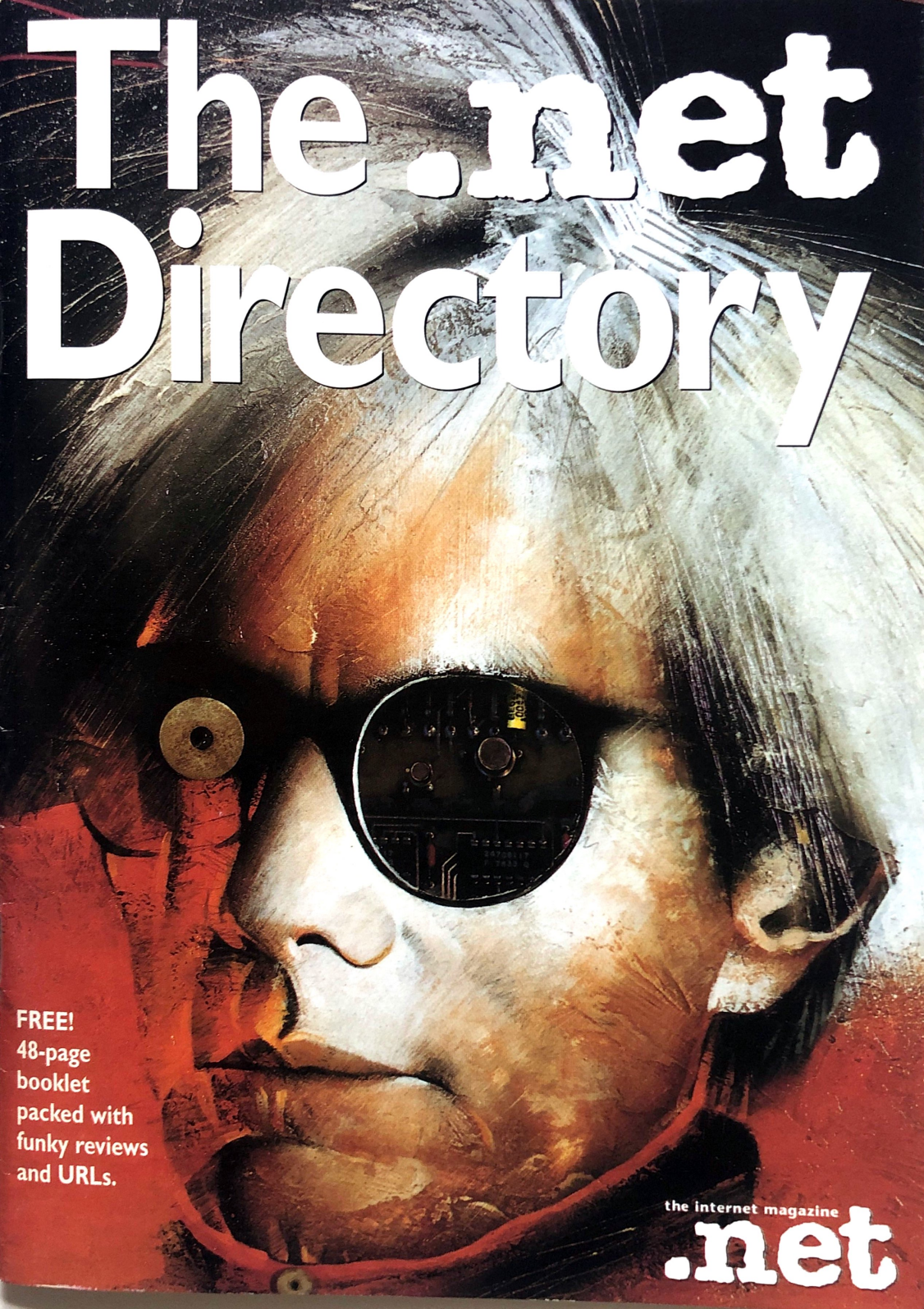
The .net Directory



FREE! 48-page booklet packed with funky reviews and URLs.

the internet magazine

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.net Home page

P4 NEWSGROUPS

With over 12,000 groups, it's hard to know where to begin. Hang on a minute, why not start here?

P18 WEB SITES

A fun-packed jamboree of enlightenment. Hang out the bunting, wave the flags of felicity and rejoice.

P38 GOPHER SITES

Root around for all sorts of information and academic advice with everyone's favourite rodent.

P41 FTP SITES

Download programs, text, sound files and pictures from these rootin' tootin' file transfer sites.

P44 TELNET & IRC

Which computers are worth Telnetting to and which IRC channels can you log on to for a good old gossip?

We review, we rate, we go on holiday

Confused by the difficult percentage review scores used by many computer magazines? Our simple easy-to-follow five-star system solves the problem in one fell swoop:

★★★★★ A six-month cruise taking in most of the Caribbean, much of the Orient and that beautiful island where they filmed The Man with the Golden Gun.

★★★★ A month's skiing in the Swiss alps, with a limitless tab in every alpine bar and brothel you come across. Plus free ski-hire, lift passes and accidental death-by-avalanche insurance.

★★★ A coupla weeks on the Costa del Criminale with cheap beer, sun, sand and the other thing. Cut-price condoms available on the flight out.

★★ A week in Skegness taking in the famous Omnibus Museum and little-known Skittles Hall of Fame.

★ Two weeks in Skeggy.

We also have a thing called a Bizarre rating, out of ten, which gives you some idea of how perverted, odd or weird a site is. Oh, yes, and then there are a couple of initials explaining who wrote the review:

SH = Simon Hindle
RL = Richard Longhurst
CP = Clive Parker

See? It's not so difficult.

Welcome to the .net directory

The .net directory is one of the most popular parts of *.net*, packing more URLs per square inch than, well, almost any other part of the mag. For those of you who've missed the first issuest, we've collected together the first four directories for your delight and delectation. For those who've already got them, here they are in a handy booklet - a real boon for the keen netsurfer, especially because it hasn't cost you a penny.

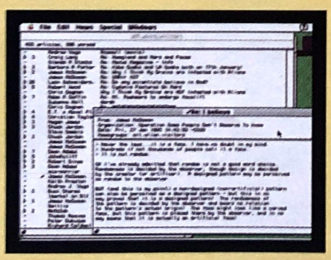
The .net directory will soon take on a life of its own beyond the confines of the magazine, as a regularly updated guide to the best that the Net has to offer. But enough of the future, on with the past...

News groups

There is literally something for everyone on the towering information Redwood that is Usenet. More than 12,000 newsgroups are waiting to offer you their fruits, so whether it's poodles or politicians, R.E.M. or revenge, step right up to the tree of wisdom and pluck the apples from its heavy bough. Read it and weep, or read it and laugh – it's all in a day's Usenet.

Alien visitors

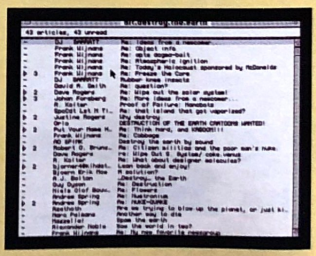
Name: alt.alien.visitors
What is it? Usenet groups for the discussion of all things alien and, er, visiting – although we don't think it means foreigners.
Where you'll find it: Usenet: newsgroup: alt.alien.visitors.
What's it like? Diverse alien-related musings – why the CIA is hiding spaceships, what do crop circles mean, how to get abducted by aliens... The sort of thing UFO-fanatics will lap up.
Upside: If we're invaded from space you'll hear about it first.
Downside: If you believe this, we already have been.
Bizarre rating: 7
Sample posting: "When I started having dreams like yours, I had been an atheist all of my adult life. I dropped everything I was doing and IMMEDIATELY left the East coast and moved to LA, where I knew the dreams originated from. It took me several years to find them, but I'm hardly alone, more than half the people who found their way here did so by the guidance they received on the dream planes; not unlike Stephen King's *The Stand* in that so many are guided to my benefactors through having seen them directly in dreams before actually getting to meet them. F. L. M. Reynolds"
Overall: ★★★



Find out whether aliens really do exist. There's solid proof in here somewhere.

Doom merchants

Name: alt.destroy.the.earth
What is it? A group of depressing



What's the best way to destroy the Earth? We'll have fun finding out.

would-be doom merchants talking about various ways in which you could destroy the Earth, what type of creatures would survive the cataclysm, and other equally upbeat topics.
Where you'll find it: Usenet: newsgroup: alt.destroy.the.earth
What's it like? Various ingenious ways of destroying all life on the planet are discussed. (Random example: You powder 200 kg of plutonium and put 0.1 grammes in two million spray cans. The cans are then distributed around the world and all activated at the same time – after a six-month period all land-based air-breathing lifeforms die of cancer or other radiation-related diseases.)

Other discussions centre on the physical destruction of the planet itself – aliens dropping blackholes into the Earth's crust which gradually eat away the matter and heat up the planet until it self-destructs. Lots of plans, documents and sketches to prove how it works are posted, and there's also masses of chat about end-of-the-world novels like Greg Bear's *The Anvil of God* and the Niven/Pournelle comet disaster novel *Lucifer's Hammer.*
Busy? Quite well attended, with an average of 50 postings a week.
Upside: It's actually quite fascinating once you get used to the rather bizarre concept...
Downside: ...but very, very depressing nonetheless.
Bizarre rating: 6
Typical quote: "It's a planet, folks, in case you haven't looked lately. We're talking about $6x10^{24}$ kilograms of stuff, folks. It's so damn big that it's managed to collect enough gravitational force (the weakest force in the universe) to pull your sorry asses tight to your chairs. It would take a while to push all of that mass around."
Overall: ★★★

Foot fetishists

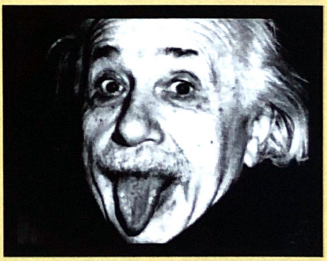
Name: alt.sex.fetish.feet
What is it? Bloody odd newsgroup where people with a fetish for a) painted toenails, b) sleek stockings, c) toe-sucking, or d) plain old smelly feet get off by talking about it.
Where you'll find it: Usenet: newsgroup: alt.sex.fetish.feet

Some feet. Earlier. If you feel an uncontrollable urge coming on, do write to tell us about it.

What's it like? Hilarious, actually. You get plenty of foot-orientated porn stories (men masturbating into women's shoes, plenty of toe-sucking, and the odd really strange one where blokes somehow manage to dislocate their jaws far enough to get an entire woman, feet first, into their mouths), lots of recommendations of films where famous actresses walk around in bare feet for long periods of time, and reports on nice feet these saddo contributors seem to have spotted on women walking around their mid-American home towns. Oh yes, and assorted gif's entitled things like 'pretty girl with nice feet, 1/1.'
Busy? Surprisingly popular actually. Often with around 150 (mostly amusing) postings.
Upside: It's *extremely* funny to read at times.
Downside: That these people actually exist.
Bizarre rating: 7
Typical quote: *"Rolling Stone.* Just bought it today. It features one of my favourite actresses: Julia Roberts!!! There were indeed a couple of good views of her feet, yeah, nice indeed, but I'm afraid they only scored about 12, and that's giving her sole and heel points for free (not possible to fully appreciate). She could have used some sexier sandals though..."
Overall: ★★★

Geeks (and nerds)

Name: alt.geek
What is it? A rather sad newsgroup, where self-confessed geeks and nerds discuss the definition of the terms 'geek' and 'nerd,' and presumably ruminate on whether being a nerd really is as trendy as the media's recently started to say it is.
Where you'll find it: Usenet: Newsgroups: alt.geek
What's it like? It's full of drivel on the lines of "My new UNIX is better than your new UNIX," and "If you can't use UNIX you must be brain-dead." Many posts are from obvious geeks who seem to revel in their geekness, while others are from people claiming not to be geeks and trying desperately to prove it by taking the piss out of the resident posters. (And if that's not geekish, we don't know what is.) On the whole, it's desperately boring – unless, of course, you're the sort of geek who enjoys this nonsense.
Upside: They're in this little, easily avoided, area of their own.
Downside: Plenty of them spread into the rest of the Net.



Was Einstein really a geek, or was he just pretending? And how can you tell?

Bizarre rating: 4
Typical quotes: "I think that a 'nerd' is a geek without a social life, but people have varying opinions; probably somebody has exactly the opposite opinion."

"I've always thought of a nerd as a kind of a 'geek-wanna-be.' But then, I'm a pretty big geek, so what would I know?"

"Cool...I have tried a similar thing with my HP48sx. Problem is the I/O buffer is only 255 bytes long, and display is slow so I have to use 2400 baud."
Overall: ★

Natural poses

Name: alt.binaries.pictures.girlfriends
What is it? The subject of much newsgroup furore, this was originally set up as an advertising forum so US company PGG Graphics could flog its softcore CD-ROMs. A huge debate about the commercial side of Usenet ensued, and it seems that the group has now been won back from the clutches of PGG.
Where you'll find it: Usenet: alt.binaries.pictures.girlfriends
What's it like? It was initially chock full of pictures of chesty women courtesy of PGG, then it was replete with argumentative posts about the commercialisation of Usenet. Now it varies between innocent pictures of girlfriends and unadulterated porn.
Busy? Looks that way, although we don't know how long for – there's more talk about the point of this newsgroup and the future of the Net than actual pictures.
Upside: It makes a welcome change after the occasional excess of alt.binaries.pictures.erotica and the like (and it's fun imagining the aggro someone would get if he did post a holiday snap of his girl). **Downside:** Would you post a picture of yours?
Bizarre rating: 2
Typical quote: "Inga, one of our girl-next-door models, poses in her garden, her dress slipping off her shoulders..."
MB
Overall: ★

Cartoon images, like this one from *Ranma1/2*, can be found at alt.binaries.pictures.anime.

Pictures by Usenet

Name: alt.binaries.pictures
What is it? A Usenet facility for sending and receiving various gifs, JPEGs etc.
Where you'll find it: Usenet: alt.binaries.pictures. (Various subgroups, ranging from animals to supermodels. Hmm, is there any difference between the two?)
What's it like? Well, it's a huge facility for sending and receiving gifs, JPEGs etc. Many people send files to each other by mail – it's a nice and convenient way of making sure a specific person gets a specific file. There are two popular ways of doing this by mail – **enclosures** and **uuencoded** files.

In the first instance, you just add the file to the mail, and when the other guy gets it his mail program says "File(s) Attached" and he sorts it out. With uuencoding, you turn the data into a 7-bit ASCII file that can be transmitted virtually anywhere, and the other guy doesn't even need a fancy mail program to sort out his attached file, because there isn't one. Still with me? Good. The thing is you'll need a uudecoder if you opt for the latter approach. Fortunately, they're readily available on the Net (src.doc.ic.ac.uk, for example). So basically what we're saying is that anywhere 7-bit ASCII goes, these uuencoded files can go.

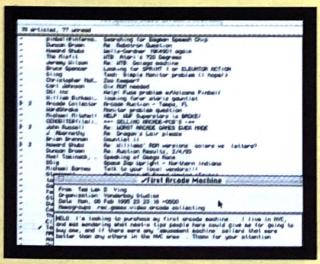
Now think hard – where is there a huge receptacle of 7-bit ASCII? Yep, Usenet! So what everybody does is uuencode all their favourite piccies and then stick 'em on the newsgroup so everyone else can drag them down and have a gander. To get these pictures, all you have to do is

take an ASCII capture of the files, uudecode them and view away. And there are some nice files here too. Problem is, uuencoded files are huge. Ginormous, in fact. So big that nine times out of ten it'd be quicker just to ftp them from somewhere else. But how many ftp sites do you know of that have a library of pictures as diverse as those on the newsgroups? No-one said the Internet was easy...
Busy? Oh yes. Traffic across all the subgroups makes the M25 look like a country lane.
Upside: Loads and loads of pictures to choose from.
Downside: The files are too big!
Bizarre rating: 1
(For the supermodels category, that is. I mean, they're on telly and in style/fashion mags all the time anyway? Who wants to spend hours downloading a file that shows images you can obtain from your local WH Smith?)
Typical quote: "A dog. File 8 of 10. fsakuryoiuewhvckjdsvn kjfdhv iurehfeiKJHIUFDdiuskjHDOIUS0909rer F:Krk;K;LSf['oirAPOJFpodsR)(ESiffd.,m mvposdiu09gIG"I)e'rpio(R")IRE"E{P" (etc.)
SH
Overall: ★★★

Coin-op collectors

Name: Coin-op collectors group
What is it? Newsgroup for arcade machine collectors
Where you'll find it: Usenet: rec.games.video.arcade.collecting
What's it like? Brilliant. I love old arcade games – *Star Wars, Discs of Tron* and the rest (anyone remember *I, Robot?)* – and this newsgroup is perfect if you want to reminisce on old favourites. Most of the users are in the US, where machines are cheaper – as an example, a *Ms PacMan* machine apparently went for $50 (!) at auction. However, more and more UK collectors are joining in. Indeed, a sale was conducted over the Net recently, where a UK four-player dedicated *Gauntlet* machine went for – wait for it – 150 quid! Can you believe it?

Anyway, even if you don't have the sort of wedge to buy arcade machines, this is still a good place to remember the good old days of *Joust* and *Tempest*. The site has its own ftp archive at **wiretap.spies.com**, which contains auction tips, game cheats and user manuals for old games. If you're feeling nostalgic and want to go somewhere unpolluted by *Mortal Kombat II* and *Super Street Fighter II*, try it out!
Upside: All those excellent guys who love the old days – they deserve gold medals for keeping the faith.
Downside: Those infuriating US prices. They're so cheap!
Bizarre rating: 0
Typical quote: "I bought an *Arkanoid* machine for $100. HAH!"
SH
Overall: ★★★



Remember Tempest? Remember Galaxians? Phoenix? Missile Command?

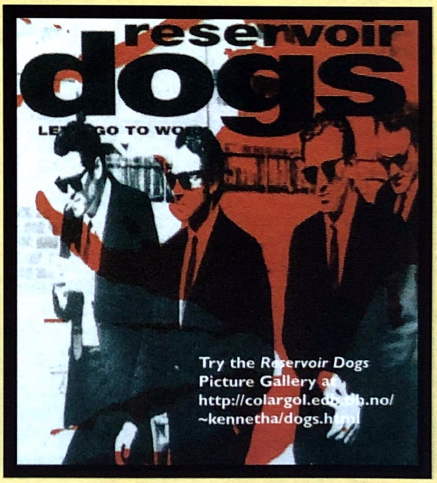
Comedy store

Name: alt.comedy.british
What is it? Discussion group for the trendier, and widely exported, British comedies (mainly TV), including *The Young Ones, Red Dwarf, Absolutely Fabulous* and *Fawlty Towers* (but not *Black Adder* and some others, which have their own newsgroups).
Where you'll find it: Usenet: alt.comedy.british
What's it like? Quite good fun in a 'Do you remember that one where...?' sort of way. Much time is spent explaining to Americans what British words mean ("Also, the word 'knacker' or 'knackered' has come up on a couple of occasions. One usage, I think, means 'famished.' Another time Lucas wanted to send Grainger out to the 'knackers.' I'm confused. Thanks for any info"), and even more people ask what many will think are really obvious questions ("Who or what were *The Goodies?*"), but it's generally kept pleasant and interesting.
Busy: Yes, with a healthy turnover of postings.
Upside: Great, if it's really bugging you whatever happened to, say, Charlie Drake.
Downside: Quite a narrow focus on six or seven shows.
Bizarre rating: 2
Typical quote: "Just how much is a 'stone' overweight anyway?"
MB
Overall: ★★★

Flamebait caption number 75: "Sorry, but Red Dwarf simply isn't funny."

Cult movies

Name: alt.cult.movies
What is it? What do you think? A discussion group for



cult movies (which seems to describe a pretty broad range of films).
Where you'll find it: Usenet: alt.cult movies
What's it like? Full of questions, answers and comments on films, including *Reservoir Dogs, Fritz the Cat, Ford Fairlane, Monty Python and the Holy Grail, Joe vs the Volcano, Brazil, Pink Floyd: the Wall, Aliens, John Woo* stuff, spaghetti westerns, *I'm Gonna Git Ya Sucka!!* etc.

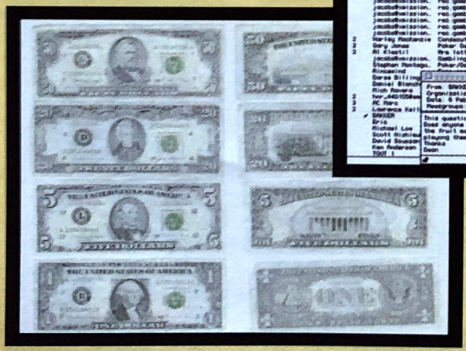
Some interesting information, some dumb-arse comments, and threads on things like actual sex in mainstream films, best uses of the word 'fuck,' you know the sort of thing to expect.
Busy? Indeedy-doody. Absolutely packed with postings.
Upside: A good read, and plenty of decent information.
Downside: It really is a bit all over the place.
Bizarre rating: 3
Typical quote: "My favourite [movie cliché] is that nobody in the movies who uses a computer ever makes a typing error, is able to type at 500 words per minute, and seems to have a modem that runs at what appears to be at least 100Kbps"
MB
Overall: ★★★

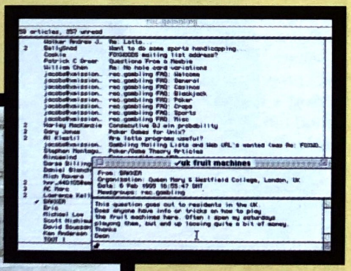
You too can lose millions!

Name: Gambling Conference
What is it? A newsgroup for gamblers, wethinks.
Where you'll find it? Usenet: rec.gambling
What's it like? I love it. I used to work in a casino and the one thing that never fails to make me laugh is people who come in with 'systems' to win. Take it from me; they *don't* work. So when I saw this newsgroup, I had to check it out. It covers gambling of all sorts, from casinos to the gee-gees. It's mostly written by gamblers for gamblers, and features a lot of slang, so if you don't know $27 across from the tiere, you'll be lost here. But stick with it. It can be fun.

As well as punters publishing their failsafe systems (ahem), there are reports from casinos around the world which rate said establishments for their games, what the facilities are like, and so on. Centred mostly around Las Vegas and Reno, Nevada, there are even reviews of the cabaret acts. (Interesting note – you won't find reviews of UK Casino cabaret because it's illegal!)

The stuff that particularly makes me laugh is the occasional post accusing dealers of cheating. Yeah, mate, and we all know about the magnets and pedals under the roulette wheels as well.
Busy? Yep – a fool and his money are easily parted, and this group lends credence to that cliché.
Upside: All the saddos that are gonna beat the bank... this time!
Downside: All the millions of posts about blackjack. Get with it – blackjack sucks!
Bizarre rating: 8
Typical quote: "***NEW SYSTEM BEATS THE WHEEL!***" (Er, right.)
SH
Overall: ★★





If you want to keep hold of your money, maybe you should think twice about taking gambling advice from complete strangers.

Kool or dumb?

Name: Kool-Aid fanclub.
What is it: A place where fans of Kool-Aid (well dodgy Yank drink) exchange opinions.
Where you'll find it: Usenet: alt.fan.kool-aid
What's it like? Quite funny. If you've never heard of Kool-Aid, it's a powder that you mix with water and an obscene amount of sugar to produce something wet and yummy. Here, fans of the stuff talk about a) what their favourite flavour is, or b) where they buy their Kool-Aid from, how much it cost them and what special offers they had. And that's it. Dear oh dear oh dear.
Upside: It shows how sad Americans are.
Downside: One day, Kool-Aid might make it to the British Isles in large quantities.
Bizarre rating: Definitely off the bloody scale.
Typical quote: "I went to K-Mart today and bought ten sachets for $1 and got a free mug! Excellent for drinking the Great Bluedini out of!"
SH
Overall: ★

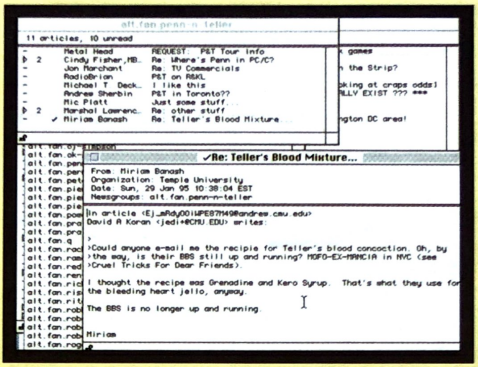
OK Soda is okay...

Name: alt.fan.ok-soda
What is it? A newsgroup about OK Soda, a new Generation X drink created by soft drinks emporium Coca-Cola. And we'll probably never get it over here.
Where you'll find it: Usenet: alt.fan.ok-soda
What's it like? Well, kind of funny, actually. I don't know if you've seen the recent ad campaign, where they say that the second most common phrase in the world is Coca-Cola. Well, the most common phrase is okay. So what do Coke do? Bring out a drink called OK. Packaged in a drab, low-key can, with simple underground-comic artwork, the drink has become an instant favourite with nerds across America. Thing is, no-one knows what it tastes like.
Busy: Hardly.
Upside: There are some fun discussions. Think of it more as alt.fan.generationX
Downside: There are plenty of saddos about too. It's like OK Soda is their life.

Bizarre rating: 9
Typical quote: "I cut off all the 'OK' symbols from the 1.5-litre bottles and stuck them on our office doors, so now our offices are OK."
SH
Overall: ★★

Nuke the USA

Name: alt.nuke.the.usa
What is it? Area where non-US citizens discuss how stupid the Americans are and why they should be nuked. In marked contrast to this, the US citizens talk about how stupid everyone else in the world is and why they should be nuked.
Where you'll find it: Usenet: alt,nuke.the.usa
What's it like? Racist ranting, constant bad language and abuse, with a smattering of sexism thrown in for good measure – it's excellent. At first glance it seems rather pointless, but once you get the feel of the group it's deliciously ironic. Threads with titles like "Haiti and the Testicleless Europeans," "The Supreme Shithead" and "Another Yankee cockup (surprise!)".
Busy? Very. There are certainly a lot of people on the Net who are out for a good argument and this a great place for them to do it. Just don't take it personally.
Upside: A great way of letting off steam without upsetting anyone.
Downside: You'll sometimes hear more intelligent insults in a junior school playground, but (hopefully) not with as much swearing.
Bizarre rating: 5
Typical quote: "Pinhead, you malodorous pile of Net-garbage. It's too bad you wrote because I had forgotten you existed, which was pleasant. What have you been up to lately? Still typing madly day and night with the pathetic para-human losers that continue to haunt alt.flame? When are you going to get a life? Go outside! Get a girlfriend! Pretend you're a man and try to move beyond the reality that you're an overgrown nerd forever doomed to grovel for status scraps in the most vile, horrid, and stinking backwater of the Internet, alt.flame."
And so on...
CP
Overall: ★★★



Probe The Unpleasant World of Penn and Teller on Usenet, but remember not to lick your fingers.

Penn and Teller

Name: alt.fan.penn-n-teller
What is it? A rather excellent newsgroup about that pair of lovable (yet brutal, in a cheeky kind of way) magicians, Penn Jilette and his silent partner, Teller. You know who I mean – they're those obnoxious Americans blokes known for giving away secrets to magic tricks. (Something, in fact, that they don't do all that often. They've only ever really given away about four or five *major* secrets... Trust me. I mean, I know how David Copperfield vanished the Statue of Liberty, and I'm not telling anyone.)
Where you'll find it: Usenet: alt.fan.penn-n-teller
What's it like? I love it, but then again I'm Penn and Teller's biggest fan. They're mostly American users, but that's not a bad thing – there are a lot of Penn and Teller's real-life friends on the group too. I managed to get a copy of a very rare TV movie they did called 'Invisible Thread' off one of them, for instance, together with a collection of all their David Letterman appearances that Teller had taped himself! Besides being able to share your thoughts with the guys' mates, you can also learn lots of interesting stuff (about the band that Penn plays with, for instance) and read transcripts of old interviews.

However, an awful lot of traffic on the group concerns itself with tour dates, and most of these are in the US. We're promised a World Wide Web page on the boys in the future, so keep 'em peeled for the address.
Busy? Not bad, but fluctuates. Can be anywhere between zero and 50 postings per day
Upside: There's so much cool stuff to find out about P'n'T, and most of the users on the group are groovers.
Downside: Having to read all those US tour dates. C'mon, guys, come to the UK! We want you!
Bizarre rating: 2
Typical quote: "I managed to get the glowing pickle trick to work. Nearly got killed, though, but it was cool."
SH
Overall: ★★★

Oh so sweet

Name: alt.revenge
What is it? A place where the wronged, the rejected and the double-crossed get advice on how to get even.
Where you'll find it: Usenet alt.revenge
What's it like? Quite a laugh most of the time, as long as nobody's trying any of these tricks on you. Many of the suggestions are delightfully devious, completely legal, and cause immense inconvenience, personal embarrassment and often expense for the unfortunate target. The less tactful simply resort to extreme (although usually carefully considered) violence against the offending one's property.
Busy? On average there are around 25 postings at any one time, dealing with such thorny problems as "Noisy neighbours," "Scum sucking boyfriends" and "My boyfriend's ex-girlfriend needs an attitude adjustment." One request for help can expect to receive five down-and-dirty solutions, some

If you lived on one of the satellites that beam television pictures down to Europe, your view would be something like this. Probably.

of which go into immense detail and stretch to
125 lines.
Upside: It's nice to know there's someone you can call on in your hour of need.
Downside: Er, but with friends like these...
Bizarre rating: 6
Typical quote: "My neighbour's stereo is driving me crazy!!!!! I even offered to purchase their son (the primary source of the problem) cordless headphones at a cost of about $200." To which another replied: "Reward the bastards for their inconsiderate behaviour? What a twit! What you might consider is buying a set of bolt cutters that are heavily insulated, around $150. Then, on a regular basis, in the DEAD OF NIGHT, creep over to their house and cut every damn cable that enters it. Include phone, cable TV, electrical, whatever... Pay some kid from another neighborhood to beat the shit out of the genetic drift that is bothering you..."
RL
Overall: ★★★

I want my MTV!

Name: alt.satellite.tv.europe
What is it? Area dedicated to discussion of satellite TV in Europe and the UK, mainly consisting of chat about where to get 'pirate' decoders for European encrypted channels in the UK, and whether you need a TV Licence if you only receive satellite TV.
Where you'll find it: Usenet: alt.satellite.tv.europe
What's it like? Interesting. A strange mix of detailed technical specs and generic 'man in the street' information about where to get hold of the various systems mentioned. Details of upcoming films on some of the European channels enable you to videotape movies not yet given a video certificate in the UK – which is quite handy. You can tape an uncut *Reservoir Dogs* and the Norwegian channel TV1000, for instance, or *The Exorcist* from Dutch channel RTL4 – as long as you don't mind Dutch subtitles.

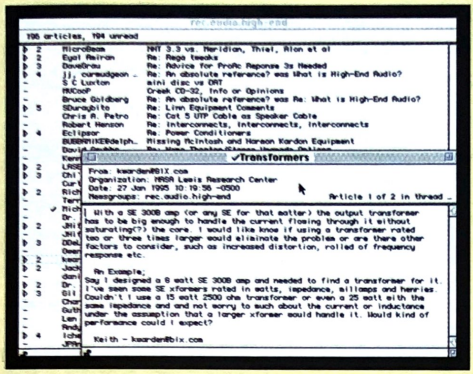
Some of the technical stuff can get deep, but you'll soon know an ultra-techy posting from its easier neighbours. There's a good mixture of information and help on offer.
Busy? Packed out. There are at least 100 new postings a week.
Upside: Lots of interesting chat for satellite buffs, with plenty of helpful information about decoders and that sort of thing.
Downside: Not very interesting if you haven't got a satellite dish yet, or you're not interested in what Sky TV can offer.
Bizarre rating: 4
Typical quote: "TVs run at 15.625KHz, and are phase-locked to the syncs of the station they are tuned to. Computer monitors run at all sorts of odd frequencies. If you could pick up timebase radiation reliably, then you could easily distinguish them."
CP
Overall: ★★★

"The truth is out there"

Name: alt.tv.x-files
What is it? Newsgroup where fans of *The X-Files* meet to talk about current episodes and speculate on the stories. *The X-Files* is a TV series about a pair of FBI agents who investigate cases involving psychic phenomena, paranormal phenomenon, possible UFOs and the American military using UFO technology to develop new aircraft.
Where you'll find it: Usenet: alt.tv.x-files.
What's it like? If you've caught the start of the first season on BBC 2, or seen the episodes on Sky, then you'll want to take a good long look in this area. Much of the info deals with the second season currently being aired in the USA.

Most of the chat is intelligent and well thought out. There's none of the mindless drivel you'll find in **alt.tv.90210**. Interesting speculation goes on about the feasibility of some of the plots, especially the mutation and UFO-related episodes.
Busy? Yes, over 200 new postings

Humbug. Nothing strange ever happens round here. And not even then.



The essential transformer-related questions of the day are asked and answered in the high-end audio group.

every time we visited the group.
Upside: Loads of interesting info about the series and the stars.
Downside: If you haven't seen all the episodes yet – BBC 2 has only shown about half the first season so far – then a lot of the chat could spoil your enjoyment.
Bizarre rating: 7
Typical quotes: "I think the guys were supposed to be some sort of special-ops/black-ops/covert action types. They might not even be military. Use of contract assets is a favourite procedure of US intelligence agencies. The weapons they were armed with were German and Austrian, which reinforces the idea of some special detachment, not connected to the regular armed forces."

"I thought someone, Mulder or his Senator friend, referred to some kind of UFO response force. I thought that's what these blue beret guys were supposed to be."
CP
Overall: ★★★★

Become an audio anorak!

Name: Usenet high-end audio newsgroup.
What is it? A newsgroup for (some would say insanely) devoted audio lovers to talk to each other and rationalise spending £3,000 on two feet of speaker cable.
Where you'll find it: Via your friendly newsserver: rec.audio.high-end
What's it like? Super weird. These people have so much money to throw around it's not true. They'll just go out and spend a fortune on a pair of headphones without thinking. Take away the ridiculous splashing of cash, however, and you'll find a serious discussion group about high-end audio here. Some of it's quite interesting too. For instance, I got quite into the debate about whether or not Sony's MiniDisc(TM) should be classed as high-end audio or not. It's definitely worth a little look, if only for the great humour value.
Busy? Quite. There's a fairly hefty amount of postings per week.
Upside: If you're thinking of spending a decent sized wedge on some hi-fi gear, you can ask the boys on here and get some top advice. Just let them know you're sensible and you don't have 20K to spend first...
Downside: There are a fair number of strange anoraks about.
Bizarre rating: 7
Typical quote: "There has been a lot of discussion about MDs here. I have taped many live shows, with cassette, DAT, and MiniDisc." Er, isn't that illegal?
SH
Overall: ★★

Drugs 'R' Us

Name: The Cannabis Appreciation Society.
What is it? A newsgroup all about that demon weed, cannabis. (Alias dope, hash, grass, ganja, slate, brick...)
Where you'll find it: alt.drugs.pot
What's it like? The Internet is a repository of free speech, and as such contains many discussion groups on illegal activities. Still, I'd argue that this is one of the more harmless of the slightly dodgy areas. A discussion group by and for pot users, it's quite a fun place, full of people discussing different ways of smoking the stuff, swapping grass recipes, moaning about the various governments of the world making a plant illegal and so on. It all sounds jolly – and it is – but remember the stuff is illegal in the UK, so be careful about posting messages. (How's it going to look when someone peruses the newsgroup and sees a message you posted about how completely stoned you got the other night? Quite cool if you're a student maybe, but perhaps not if the person reading it is your straight-laced boss. Of course, what they're doing reading this newsgroup anyway is another matter entirely...)

For more info on cannabis and other drugs, check out the following WWW site. It has unbiased info on many narcotics, and then more biased info on taking them. Open a URL to **http://www.paranoia.com/drugs/** and take it from there. It's not a bad place.
Busy: So-so. Most users are probably too stoned to get to the keyboards to enter anything.
Upside: Some of it's very funny.
Downside: Some of it's quite sad. And the subject matter's illegal, even if talking about it isn't...
Bizarre: 8
Typical quote: "If you think driving slowly is a problem, you should hear what happened to my cousin as she was driving back from somewhere totally baked. She stopped at a stop sign, and kept waiting for it to turn green for about half an hour, before she realised it was a stop SIGN, not a stop light." Oh dear.
SH
Overall: ★★★

Seedy ROM

Name: CD-ROM newsgroup
What is it? A popular area, where questions, answers, hints and tips about CD-ROM are debated. Everything from games to hardware problems come under the microscope.
Where you'll find it: Usenet: alt.cd-rom.
What's it like? It's a general discussion group about CD-ROM, where everyone can

Haven't we seen this before? Maybe we should call Mulder or something.

present their point of view – contributors range from nuclear physicists (honest!) to game players hunched over their PCs. Most of the chat appears to concentrate on game problems, although technical Q&As are littered about. Drives and CD-ROM discs are offered for sale, and the merits of the best mail-order suppliers are discussed. If a CD-ROM title gets recommended in this newsgroup, it can apparently cause a boom is sales for that specific disc. Mail order companies can also benefit (or die a horrible death) as a result of positive/negative feedback in this forum. Everyone's polite, and you get almost immediate response to your questions.

Busy? You bet! Hundreds of postings on all kinds of subjects.

Upside: Lots of help, information and postings.

Downside: Switching from reading a game solution to a high-tech posting on CD-ROM mechanics can be overwhelming. Dividing the material up into separate areas would help.

Bizarre rating: 3

Typical quotes: "This is Version 0.5 pl1 of hpcdtoppm, Hadmut's pcd to ppm converter. It has this name to be distinguishable in case someone else is producing a program also called pcdtoppm."

"7th Guest constantly fiddles with my relative volumes. I just use the software mixer to really bias the settings before I load the game up, and when it readjusts them, it readjusts them to a workable level. This doesn't always work, though. If anyone knows a way to stop the game from modifying the various volumes outright, I'd love to know."

CP

Overall: ★★★

Mmm, doughnuts!

Name: Usenet cookbook

What is it? A forum for everyone to swap their recipes.

Where you'll find it: Usenet: newsgroup: rec.food.recipes

What's it like? Imagine the world's largest cookbook. I know it's sad, but try anyway. Well, rec.food.recipes is like that, but about a billion times bigger – and more flexible. Everyone from all over the world sends in their recipes and stuff, and, even better, you get virtually no flame mail! (Imagine flame mail on a recipe newsgroup: "I tried that cookie recipe you posted and they were TERRIBLE! You dumb fool!" etc.) In fact, there are few replies to messages, other than suggested improvements or variations, so almost every message (and there are a lot of them) is a totally new meal for you to make a mess of. Many of the users on the newsgroup are really good cooks/chefs/housewives/whatever as well, so the majority of recipes really are delicious. The most popular ones appear to be for biscuits, by the way...

Busy: I should say so.

Upside: Yum.

Downside: Recipes that you can't make, and/or (and this is rare) recipes that turn out to be icky once you do.

Bizarre: 0 (Everybody has to eat)

Typical quote: "Then bake at gas mark six for 40 minutes..."

SH

Overall: ★★★★★

Paranoid? Me?

Name: alt.paranet.ufo

What is it? Busy Usenet newsgroup visited by those who believe in UFOs, cattle mutilation and abductions.

Where you'll find it: Usenet: alt.paranet.ufo

What's it like? Spooky! Discussions range from government conspiracies, bizarre phenomena, crop circles and the famous Roswell UFO crash in the late '40s to chat about official NATO documents proving UFOs exist. There're even files purporting to be photos of UFOs for you to download and view.

The chat is a mixture of statements about what people have actually experienced, analysis and discussion of events, and a smattering of sceptical enquiries thrown in for good measure.

Busy? Packed with paranoid pseuds pontificating on paranormal phenomena, particularly UFOs and prominent psychic presences. Phew.

Upside: It could all be true!

Downside: Most of these guys haven't been abducted yet.

Bizarre rating: 8

Typical quotes: "Something went through my field of vision, moving right to left. I caught up to it quickly and saw two objects flying in close formation, one in front, the other behind and to the right. They were both the same size, shaped like equilateral triangles with straight edges, flying point forward. Their colour appeared to be flat slate gray, against a deep black sky. There were

Put Portishead on the stereo, read a couple of back issues of the *Fortean Times*, smoke something very strange and you might just believe that this is a UFO.

Members of the Flying Circus head off to their annual medieval dinner-dance.

no features, and I saw no lights or glow of any kind. They appeared to be illuminated by the city lights."

"A guy was going to his cabin in the woods. As he arrived, he was swarmed by National Forest rangers who asked what he was doing there. He said, 'Going to my own cabin.' The rangers said they were asked by the Feds to check him out, because he was tracked by satellite. How's THAT for a paranoia-making NWO scenario? Except it ain't a scenario, but reported."

CP

Overall: ★★★

And now something completely different?

Name: Monty Python newsgroup

What is it? Lively chat group where demented Python fans talk about their favourite sketches, films, records and books.

Where you'll find it: Usenet: alt.fan.monty-python

What's it like? Zany, wacky and predictably teapot, this busy newsgroup stars such luminaries as Mrs Premise and Mrs Conclusion, in collaboration with Ron Obvious and the Piranha brothers, Doug and Dinsdale – even Spiny Norman makes frequent appearances.

Highlights include entrants in the Upper Class Twit of the Year contest posting various messages, finding details of other interesting Python related ftp sites, and reading the complete scripts of sketches and films. On the downside, loads of (mainly American) Python fans tend to go on a bit too long about, for instance, whether either African or European swallows could really carry coconuts from the tropics to the UK. It was only a five-minute sketch in the first place...

Busy? "I told you once."
"When?"
"Just now."
"No, you didn't!"
"Yes I did." And so on...

Upside: It's got everything you could possibly want if you're a Python fan.

Downside: It's all 20 years old.

Bizarre rating: 8

Typical quote: "You are quite right... The atmosphere does have a tendency to thin when moving from the equator to either of the poles... And gravity does vary from place to place... It could be slightly heavier in England than in Africa... And the wingspan of every African and European swallow does differ from one to the other. So, in order to make it a true average, we would have to take *all* the African and European swallows, have them take the same flight path from Africa to Europe, the *exact* same path, taking into account:

1. The 'flappage,' the weight, and the wingspan of the bird, and whether or not it has a tendency to stop at the diner for Spam...

2. The thickness of the atmosphere from the equator to Europe and the *exact* path. This would possibly also determine the 'flappage' constant of the bird...

3. The gravitational pull along the *exact* path that the birds take flight... Also determine a type of constant of elevation for each bird...

4. And then we must average *all* of the flights, taking into account the experimental and random errors..."

Enough already.

CP

Overall: ★★★★★

Dearie, dearie me...

Name: Pantyhose news

What is it? Hugely popular area where man (and women, if we're to believe the names) discuss the merits and benefits of wearing pantyhose (tights to you and me).

Where you'll find it: Usenet: alt.pantyhose

What's it like? A stunningly busy area, full of heated discussions about what should and shouldn't really be classified as pantyhose. (Interestingly (!), stockings are not considered to be the real thing by the majority of posters.) There are plenty of pictures of boys and girls wearing various pantyhose items, including many of the posters themselves, while some crossover with alt.sex.fetish.feet and similar newsgroups is inevitable.

Busy? Yes, stunningly so.

Upside: Hey, come on.

Downside: Just stop and think about it...

Bizarre rating: 10

Typical quotes: "Does anyone know of any good movies of TV shows with good nylon foot scenes? Please e-mail me and let me know."

"Anyway, a little about me: I love pantyhose, stockings, garters, thigh-highs, and bodystockings. I do not usually like any type of hosiery that is shorter than thigh-length. I also have a foot fetish, and hosiery always enhances this!"

"Just today I downloaded about 30 brilliant pictures from alt.pantyhose, and alt.sex.fetish.feet. Picture uploaders, thank you!"

"However, posts which relate to tights, bodystockings, bodysuits and leotards and related form-fitting garments, should be included. These garments all exhibit the attributes that we find stimulating about pantyhose – tightness of fit, smoothness of feel and tactile stimulation. It could be argued that these topics are best discussed in alt.lycra or the proposed alt.dancewear."

CP

Overall: ★★

Hit or myth?

Name: Scientific folklore

What is it? Weird area where people propose ideas based on popular scientific misconceptions – the 'folklore' of the title – and then get themselves slapped into shape by guys and gals who are supposedly 'in the know' about specific subjects.

Where you'll find it: Usenet: alt.folklore.science

What's it like? A crazy, jumbled up mixture of *Tomorrow's World, Beyond 2000*

If you're having a little local difficulty with a small neighbouring country, why not try the new patented ACME nuclear device as developed in alt.science.follore?

and the *Fortean Times* – lots of facts mixed up with even more folklore and horrible misconceptions. Many of the supposed expert replies are weirder than the original queries and postings.

Still, where else will you find anything and everything from steam-powered vehicles and automatic light switches to the physics of nuclear and atomic weapons? It's all interesting stuff, and some of the ideas put forward can be outrageously funny.

Busy? Oh yes. There are loads of people out there with half-assed ideas about science, and loads of others who love nothing better than to correct them.

Upside: Funny – some people obviously enjoy being a punchbag for others who think they know better. And it gets you thinking.

Downside: Most of it will mean nothing if you have only limited knowledge of science. (Then again, don't let that stop you!)

Bizarre rating: 5

Typical quotes: "In order to compress the fissionable material into the supercriticality needed for a fission reaction, the explosive compression has to be pretty much perfectly symmetrical. If one segment of the explosive material is removed, then the explosion, if it occurs, won't be symmetrical. The fissile material will still compress, and probably be scattered all over by the force of the explosion, but certainly won't achieve the compression necessary for a supercritical mass, and thus, will not achieve a nuclear detonation."

CP

Overall: ★★

Welcome to Legoland

Name: Lego user group

What is it? Active discussion group whose members talk about all things Lego.

Where you'll find it: Usenet: rec.toys.lego

What's it like? For a Lego fan it's great. For everyone else it's useless. Guys and girls discuss the new Technical, Space and Castle sets and other Lego subjects. Posts like "Have you seen the new Castle sets?" and "What colour scheme do the new (well, mid-'95) Castles have?" are common, but many of the discussions are about trading pieces and selling sets. There are also references to the Lego World Wide Web server at **http://legowww.homepages.com/**, where you can download images of Lego constructs.

Busy? Yeah, there are typically several hundred posts.

Upside: Trade with other Lego nuts to get those rare sets/pieces.

Downside: It does seem rather sad at times.

Bizarre rating: 7

Typical quotes: "...but those tyres are from the late '70s, early '80s Space Lego collection. Perhaps mid-'80s would be a better description. I am unsure when Lego phased these out of the sets. They're cool little tyres, though, aren't they?"

"You guys are all psychos. You should get out more. You should go out and get laid or something. I mean, come on, adults talking about Lego on the Net?"

CP

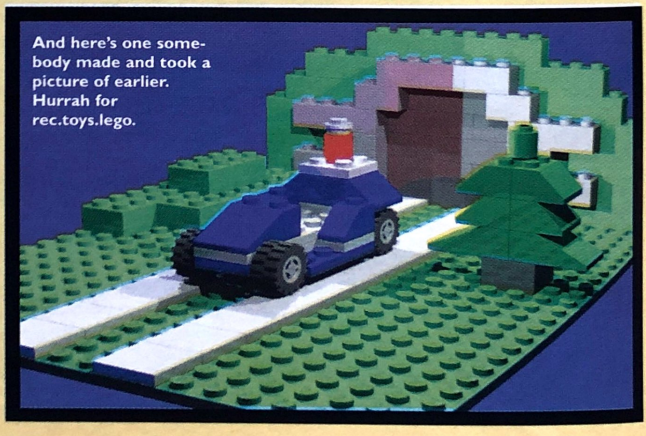
Overall: ★★★

War zone men

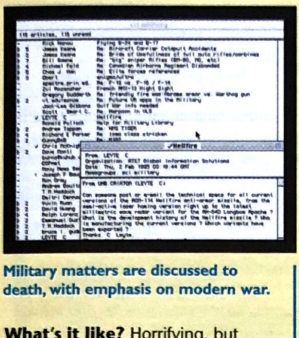
Name: Military science newsgroup

What is it? Discussion group for people interested in the scientific and practical aspects of how modern weapons work.

Where you'll find it: Usenet: sci.military



And here's one somebody made and took a picture of earlier. Hurrah for rec.toys.lego.



Military matters are discussed to death, with emphasis on modern war.

What's it like? Horrifying, but compelling stuff. It's strangely interesting to find out how a fragmentation grenade or a cluster bomb has been especially designed to maim and kill.

New technology is very much in evidence, with details of military lasers and sound-based weapons cropping up all the time. This is counter-balanced by in-depth details of older technology dating from the Napoleonic Wars. Other information includes lists of battles, hardware and vehicles.

There's also a regular newsletter posted by the Air Force News Agency from its HQ at Kelly Air Force Base, Texas. It won't surprise you to learn that contributors to this group are almost exclusively male, because warfare is traditionally a male-dominated pastime.

Busy? With several 100 posts every week, there's obviously a big interest in warfare.

Upside: More information than you'll ever need to know about the scientific aspects of ancient and modern warfare.

Downside: Body counts discussed dispassionately when describing how effective a weapon is. Chilling.

Bizarre rating: 5

Typical quote: "I was reading a Technical Manual on the M203 Grenade launcher. It has a section listing various ordnance available for it and their uses. According to the manual, a M441 HE round arms itself about 2.4 meters from the barrel. How is the fuse designed so that it arms in flight? Does it then detonate upon contact with the target or what?"

"Don't know the arming mechanism. It might be rotation or pyrotechnic. Yes, they detonate on impact. I read about a guy in Vietnam who got a 40mm grenade embedded in his back. The medics were nervous because they couldn't tell if it was armed."

CP

Overall: ★★★★

Pet's corner

What is it? General newsgroup where pet lovers swap hints, tips and information about caring for their pets.

Where you'll find it: Usenet: rec.pets

What's it like? Quite odd actually. Most of the posts I saw catered for more unusual creatures like ferrets, pygmy African hedgehogs and genets (a rare breed of cat). Common breeds of cats and dogs are discussed, but not in as much detail (probably because they have their own specific newsgroups like **rec.pets.cats**, **rec.pets.birds** and **rec.pets.dogs.breeds**).

Still, you can always take heart that the official Ferret FAQ is on-line in five parts, and covers such specialities as Care and Behaviour to a full Medical Overview. Particularly handy, that.

Busy? Of course it's busy. People just *love* their pets.

Upside: All those furry little mammals are *soooo* cute!

Downside: Some people get far too attached to their rats.

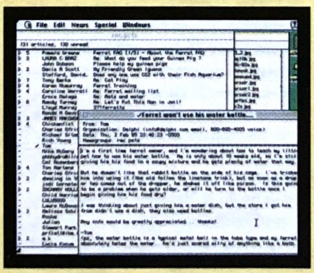
Bizarre rating: 4

Typical quotes: "We just picked up the latest information on the next ferret show (sponsored by FURO) in Denver. It will be in March at the Twin Peaks Mall in Longmont, CO."

"Are you familiar with large spotted genet cats? My neighbour just bought a genet trio (all untamed as yet). She is having a very difficult time sexing them. Can you give her some advice?"

CP

Overall: ★★★



Thank goodness that worrying ferret issues can be addressed without delay.

Car boot sale

Name: Private for sale ads

What is it? Very popular UK newsgroup where you can buy everything from extra RAM for your computer to a Daimler Dart SP250.

Where you'll find it: Usenet: uk.forsale

What's it like? There's loads of second-hand gear on sale here. Although most items are Mac or PC related hardware and software, there's plenty of other stuff available if you browse around. Fancy a three bedroom semi-detached house in York or a T-reg Fiesta, for instance?

Of course, you can place want ads here, so if you're after a complete collection of *Twin Peaks* videos, this is the newsgroup to contact. I didn't see anything I actually wanted myself, but if I do ever need a 16Mb SIMM for under 300 quid in the near future, this is where I'll look first.

Busy? Very popular, with loads of new posts added every day.

Upside: Almost 500 ads to look through every week.

Downside: It's almost entirely computer orientated.

Bizarre rating: 2

Typical quotes: "Two-bedroom detached house for sale just outside Newmarket. Close to the A14 and within 20-25 minutes drive of Cambridge. £41,500."

"I have a pristine copy of *The Soundhouse Tapes*, which is the first ever published recording IM (Iron Maiden) did. As far as I know, about 2,000 were handed out at the early gigs. It is a seven inch EP with three songs."

CP

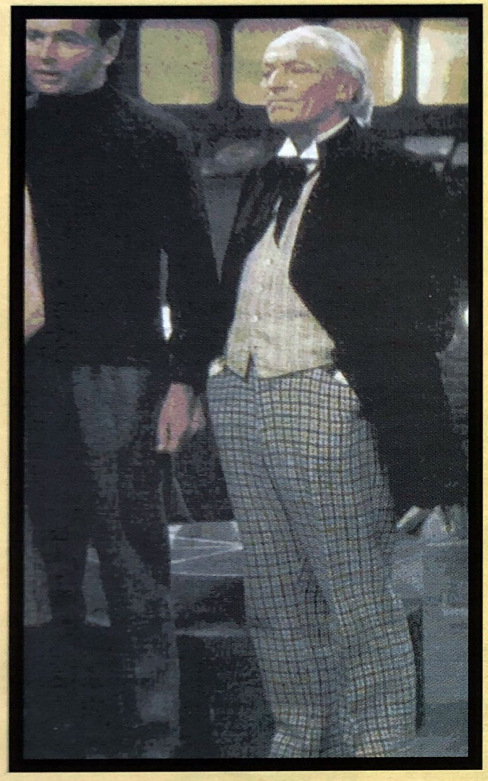
Overall: ★★★

Science fiction

Name: Sci-fi TV

What is it? Large newsgroup where sci-fi TV shows, old and new, are discussed and dissected.

Where you'll find it: Usenet: rec.arts.sf.tv



The first ever Doctor reprises his role for a special celebrity gala performance for the assembled Usenet masses. Genuflect before the glowing greatness that is science fiction TV.

What's it like? Detailed summaries, reviews and discussions of the current crop of new sci-fi shows airing on TV – mainly in the US. There's also a lot of chat and analysis of older series like *The Twilight Zone* and the original series of the *Tomorrow People* too.

Users examine the relative merits of different shows, and then savagely pull them to pieces for any scientific anomalies. You can pick up good info on programmes you follow – in the States the second series of *The X-Files* is over halfway through now – and there are detailed FAQs and links to many different sci-fi related ftp and Web sites.

Campaigns to resurrect old and cancelled favourites like *Battlestar Galactica* and *The Adventures of Brisco County Junior* are common, with details of contacts at the TV companies to bombard with mail. For sci-fi and fantasy fans, this newsgroup is a vital stop.

Busy? Incredibly. There were well over 3,000 posts to the group when I visited.

Upside: Lots of inside info and analysis of the latest episodes of new sci-fi TV shows.

Downside: They've made a new *Six Million Dollar Man* TV movie.

Bizarre rating: 5

Typical quotes: "I think the first season of *Lost in Space* had the most potential, capturing the excitement of interplanetary travel and portraying a semi-reasonable space family. One of my favourite episodes was 'Mr. Nobody.' Any comments?"

"Earth 2 is just about the biggest travesty of sci-fi since *Lost in Space.* Pitiful females, snobby space-yuppies, terminally cute cubs and scripts Samuel Z Arkoff would have lost his lunch over. Yuk. Pfui. Barf."

CP

Overall: ★★★★

Urgh, nasty

Name: alt.binaries.pictures. tasteless

What is it? Quite possibly the sickest thing on the whole Net.

Where you'll find it: alt.binaries.pictures.tasteless – take a friend with you, it's definitely not for the squeamish.

What's it like? Tasteless doesn't even begin to describe it. If you've already checked out a binaries.pictures group, you've more than likely visited one of the sex ones. Anyway, the shots here make the gorefest in *Brain Dead* look like a nursery school picnic. People scan in the most tasteless things and stick them here.

If images of folk with spikes through their mouth or pictures of a bloke just after a firing squad have done their business tickle your fancy, check it out. There are no holds barred here. We're not doing this as a recommendation; we're doing it as a warning. The more disturbed among us have an obsession with the macabre, and this newsgroup caters for such individuals. Quite well, in fact. Which means when you see a description of a picture that says: "Bloke who's just had both his feet cleaved off in a road accident" they're not joking, okay? And, yes, that is a real example. And it looked bloody nasty.

However, there's a sneaking suspicion that there's some Net censorship going on in the group on JANET's part, because in the last few months the only posts that have been getting through to a.b.p.t on my university newsserver have been the crossposted "WHAT/WHY/HOW of alt.binaries.pictures" that go to *all* the alt.binaries.pictures groups. Whether you agree with the existence of the group or not, whose place is it to decide what we can and cannot see?

Upside: Ahem.

Downside: Take a sick bag.

Bizarre rating: Are you serious? Numbers can't describe it.

SH

Overall: Defies a star rating.

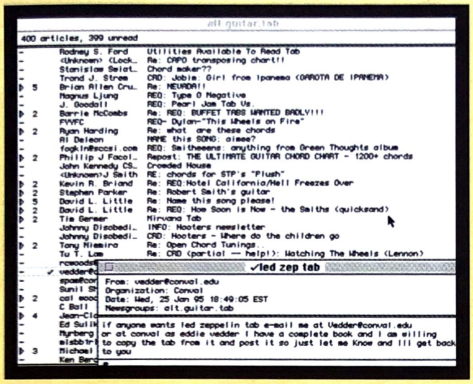
Play anything you want

Name: alt.guitar.tab

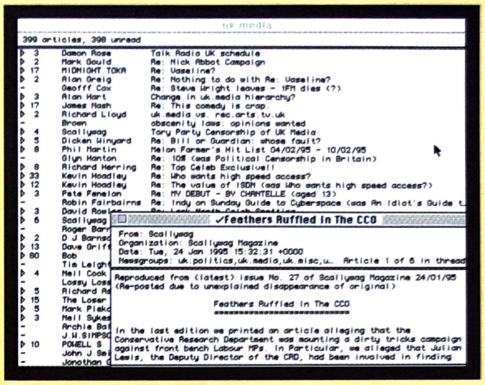
What is it: A newsgroup where mad strummers obtain simplified versions of their favourite toons.

Where you'll find it: alt.guitar.tab

What's it like? All serious posers check this place out. Suppose you've got this ace tune you really like – *Two Princes* by the Spin Doctors, for example. And you want to play it so you too can get loads of birds/blokes round your house after a particularly impressive gig. Problem is, you're not so hot on the guitar and you can't afford the sheet music. Not to worry, help is at hand! Simply hop on to the superhighway and get the tab for said ditty, practise, and stardom is as



If you want to play like Ziggy or Jimi, or even someone good like Mr Marr, pick up a guitar tab from the newsgroup.



The uk.media newsgroup discusses topics as diverse as censorship and which celebrities you've met in a lift.

good as yours. Almost. A tab is a sheet with the basic melody of the song written out in a way so that even those who can't read sheet music can give a tune the old Clapton treatment. Some amazingly talented musicians hang around on the newsgroup, and if you put up a post asking for the tab to a newly released song, assuming it's nothing crap, they'll go off, listen to it a couple of times and return with a freshly created sheet. It's great for song lyrics too.

Upside: The sheer number of tabs available for downloading.

Downside: You actually have to be able to play a little first. (alt.air.guitar.tab remains but a beautiful dream.)

Bizarre rating: 2

Overall:

★★★★★ for axmeisters,

★★★ for karaoke gods – but, hey, you get the lyrics, as well. It had to happen sometime...

That's us, that is!

Name: ***.net***'s very own newsgroup!

What is it? A newsgroup dedicated to yours truly.

Where you'll find it: uk.media.mags.net (shouldn't it be uk.media.mags..net?)

What's it like? A bit boring at the moment. Only three postings at the time of writing (two days after it was set up), and they followed the usual flame-response-flame tradition.

First someone posted something to the lines of "This mag is crap." Ho ho ho. Very imaginative. Then, ***.net***'s publisher Stuart Anderton replied with words to the effect of "Oh no it's not," and because it was the pantomime season, it won't take long to guess what form the third posting took. It could develop into quite a fun forum, though, with discussions about the mag, rather than the netmag-talk mailing list, which seems to chat about Netscape and CompuServe.

Upside: It proves that people are buying the magazine.

Downside: God help the first person who has a go at The ***.net*** Directory, especially my bits...

Bizarre rating: 3

SH

Overall: ★★★

What the papers say

Name: UK Media

What is it? UK-based discussion group about what's happening in the UK press, on TV, the radio – and at the movies.

Where you'll find: uk.media

What's it like? All kinds of chat and discussion about the state of the UK media, ranging from "Does ***.net*** have a future?" to "The Melon Farmer's Hit List." The former was a discussion group about ***.net*** and other Internet mags; the latter a regular weekly debate on the seemingly savage editing of films transmitted by the BBC and ITV.

Posters to uk.media are quick to pounce on newspaper articles about the Internet and rip them to shreds. A recent feature about the Net in the *Independent on Sunday* was particularly derided for stating, among other laughable comments, that "all external modems are battery-powered." Yes, that's right, isn't it?

Busy? With the state of the UK press and TV, it's guaranteed to attract a lot of volatile discussion from different parties.

Upside: Addresses of all the TV companies and regulatory bodies to whom you can complain about censorship in films.

Downside: Some discussions get very petty and can wander completely off-topic.

Bizarre rating: 0

Typical quotes: "But you fall into the trap of all censorship is bad whereas some of it is 'right.' I for one would not like the idea of the BBC showing skin-flicks at 5pm on a Wednesday afternoon to any kids I might have."

"Not showing skin-flicks during children's TV is not censorship. Time, place and manner restrictions are often entirely appropriate. Not allowing skin-flicks to be shown at all, anywhere, however, is censorship. Not allowing Gerry Adam's voice to be heard was censorship too.

"And if the plug were to be pulled on tonight's *Equinox*, as desired by Rees-Mogg and the National Viewers and Listeners Association, then that too would be censorship."

CP

Overall: ★★★★

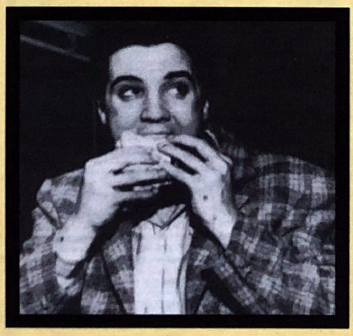
Web sites

The easiest way to get into the Internet is to fire up a Web browser (make sure you get A-grade coal) and cruise some pages. Newsgroups, FTP and Gopher sites can be accessed with the latest browsers, but for that full multimedia experience, you've got to go kerb crawling on the Web. Don't worry about what you might catch, you can always throw it back.

Auntie on the Net

Name: BBC Networking Club
What is it? An introduction to the BBC Networking Club, with detailed background information about the BBC.
Where you'll find it?
http://www.bbcnc.org.uk/babbage/iap.html
e-mail: info@bbcnc.org.uk
What's it like? Contains interesting materials about several BBC programmes and radio broadcasts, including *The Net* and *The Big Byte.*

Also has weekly schedules for BBC TV channels One and Two and Radio One, Two, Three, Four, and Five, and also features the European Entertainment Channel, the News and Information Channel and World Service Radio in English, *The Caversham Diaries, Gardeners' World,* and *Money Box.* The BBCNC has made some progress in allocating programmes Internet addresses, and those that have them are listed here. The club pages are a bit static, though, with some old information.
Upside: Reasonable TV schedules.
Downside: Considering the amount of information that could be here, it's limited.
Bizarre rating: 2
Overall: ★★



Yum, yum. Can you see this man putting on weight in a couple of years? One sandwich does not obesity make.

Elvis lives!

Name: The Elvis Aaron Presley Home Page
What is it? Elvis lives on the Internet. A wonderful all-things Elvis resource ("This page was created to honour Elvis and his cultural and musical legacy, not to belittle or defame him, so only those who believe in The King should read on"), this is recommended to diehard fans of The Pelvis, and American pop culture generally.
Where you'll find it:
http://128.194.15.32/~ahb2188/elvishom.html
What's it like? The Graceland

[Clears throat] "Are you lonesome tonight? Do you miss me tonight? Are you sorry I died in strange circumstances from a mysterious food overdose?"

tour's been closed down by the real Graceland people, but you can still stroll through The Elvis Exhibit, learn things you never wanted to know about Elvis and sign the guest book. Best item is a hilarious seance where you're supposedly communicating with Elvis beyond the grave – complete with annotated responses:
"Question: Do you now approve of drug abuse?
Answer: No
Interpretation: Having had the last 27 years to ponder his last years with us on Earth, it seems Elvis has learned from his own mistakes.
Question: Are fried banana and peanutbutter sandwiches as good as your biographies say they were?
Answer: Yes/No
Interpretation: They taste good, but they are bad for you."
Upside: If you love Elvis, you'll love this site.
Downside: Vice versa.
Bizarre rating: 8
Overall: ★★★★

Internet info

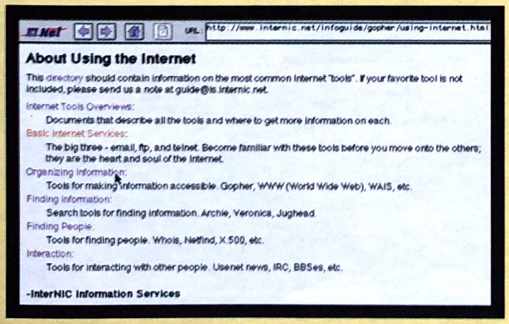
Name: About using the Internet
What is it? A Web page enabling you to go to – and grab – reams of documents and files about using the Internet.
Where you find it:
http://www.internic.net/infoguide/gopher/using-internet.html
What's it like? Basically, this Web page is a link to a series of gopher sites where you can find text files detailing all the major Internet tools that are available.

You'll find documents here describing all the major tools and where to get them, more specific information on e-mail, ftp and telnet software, plus info on gathering software like gopher, the World Wide Web and Wais.

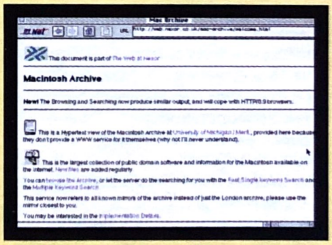
Other pages tell you more about searching utilities such as Archie, Veronica and Jughead, utilities for finding people on the Net, and software for accessing Usenet newsgroups. It's a brilliant service, and an ideal place to start if you're a beginner who wants to find out more about the Internet.,
Busy? Yes, and deservedly so. It's certainly a popular Web page for newbies (that's Net slang for new Net users).
Upside: Packed with loads of useful information.
Downside: Text files only (but does that really matter?).
Bizarre rating: 0
Overall: ★★★★

Mac Shareware

Name: Mac Archive
What is it? It's the biggest Net site for Macintosh Shareware in the world. All you have to do to download it is select the name of your nearest site.
Where you'll find it:
http://web.nexor.co.uk/mac-archive/welcome.html
What's it like? It's the ultimate source for Mac Shareware and PD software. All new Mac software released worldwide is added to the list every couple of weeks. To see the latest uploads, you just have to click on 'new files.' All fields are covered, including source code for programmers, programming tools and utilities, graphics, sound, and general tools and utilities. You can either browse through the files section by section, or perform keyword searches using your



An essential stop-off point on the World Wide Web for newbies, oldbies and in-between-bies. Learn some netiquette and never get flamed again.



You need never buy another commercial program for your Macintosh (as long as you only want to use the ones from the massive Mac Shareware Archive, that is).

You've got to laugh, haven't you? (Perhaps not if you're the frog.)

Web software, which makes it easy to find specific software or programs. If you enter AIFC as a search item, all sound software that uses AIFC sound samples is displayed, for example. Simple and elegant stuff.
Busy? Probably the most visited Internet site for Mac users.
Upside: Lots of easy-to-get-to software at the end of the line.
Downside: Your hard drive is bound to be too small to cope with everything.
Bizarre rating: 0
Overall: ★★★★★

Virtual frog slicing

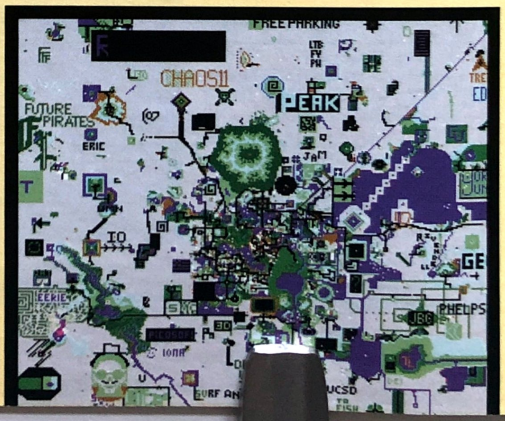
Names: Interactive Frog Dissection Tutorial and Frog Dissection Kit.
What is it? Two Web sites are currently competing to introduce you to the intricacies of frog dissection, one concentrating on the actual bits of a frog, the other on the details of the actual operation itself.
Where you'll find them:
Dissection Tutorial:
http://curry.edschool.Virginia.EDU:80/~insttech/frog/
Dissection Kit:
http://george.lbl.gov/ITG.hm.pg.docs/dissect/info.html
What are they like? The Interactive Frog Dissection Tutorial from the University of Virginia offers a series of lessons with full colour images and Quicktime movies of step-by-step frog dissection.

After completing this dissection, you should be able to identify the locations involved in the dissection procedures and the organization of the frog's major internal organs.

At the other site, with the Frog Dissection Kit, you can perform two operations – change the view of the frog, and remove/insert the exterior and internal organs. The organs are colour-coded to make them more readily identifiable. This is more of a learn-the-bits lesson than a learn-how-to-do-it exercise. Both of these sites are highly recommended and are excellent examples of interactive Web use.
Upside: Choice in frog dissection.
Downside: Definitely not for the squeamish newbie.
Bizarre rating: 4
Overall: ★★★★★

Wake up and smell the coffee

Name: Over The Coffee
What is it? The 'Over The Coffee' Web site is run by, you guessed it, a coffee addict, and is totally dedicated to the on-line coffee community. Access a coffee books and magazines list, mail order coffee and tea vendors, coffee file archives, links to Usenet coffee groups, the coffee reference desk and CoffeeLink, which connects up to other Internet coffee and caffeine sites.
Where you'll find it:
http://www.infonet.net:80/showcase/coffee/
What's it like? Obsessed, but varied. You can talk to on-line speciality coffee vendors about their products, and there's also a link to the caffeine FAQ, which would be a good read over breakfast, with its descriptions of caffeine molecules and what happens when you overdose on caffeine. Also linked is the legendary 'Trojan Room coffee machine' site at Cambridge University Computer Lab – check how much coffee is left in the machine before you trek all the way over for a cup!
Upside: You can almost smell this one wafting through the office.
Downside: Rather US orientated, although you could order by mail.
Bizarre rating: 5
Overall: ★★★★



Little-known coincidence: this shot of WebWorld from .net issue zero shows FutureNet Webweaver Neil Elkins' city (Phelps on the right-hand side), yet he didn't join the team until three months later. Weird.

"Woodstock are OK, but I prefer their earlier stuff." and other muddled musical cliches.

WebWorld

Name: WebWorld
What is it?
An interactive world in which you can claim land and build your own home, office or city. Construct roads, plant forests and raise mountains – then, once you've established a presence, you can expand or link to outside resources. Anything that you build in WebWorld is yours to change or tear down and no-one else can change what you create.
Where you'll find it:
http://sailfish.peregrine.com/WebWorld/welcome.html
e-mail Ron Britvich:
ronb@peregrine.com
What's it like? Worth a visit any time. Quite bizarrely, as you wander around you'll see eyes looking at you – these represent other WebWorld users who are currently using the system. When visiting WebWorld you can just parachute into it via an aerial map. A nice touch.
Upside: Completely different to everything else in Cyberspace.
Downside: Graphically, there's far too much going on. It's a pain to actually build anything too.
Bizarre rating: 6
Overall: ★★★★

Weird and wonderful

Name: *Fortean Times* on-line.
What is it? Web site for the famous magazine that catalogues the weird and the unexplained.
Where you'll find it:
http://forteana.mic.dundee.ac.uk/ft/
e-mail: bobr@fort-br.demon.co.uk
What's it like? Charles Fort (hence *Fortean)* once noted: "The business of 'finding out' is bound to offend most those with closed minds or who have a vested interest in the status quo." *FT* has chronicled the weird and the wonderful from around the world since 1973 and it's good to see it arrive here on the Internet. 'Readers' are encouraged to submit scans of news clippings for the archive.
Upside: Information on latest and back issues; how to order.
Downside: A bit skimpy so far, with only one newscutting.
Bizarre rating: 9
Overall: ★★★★

The well at Woodstock

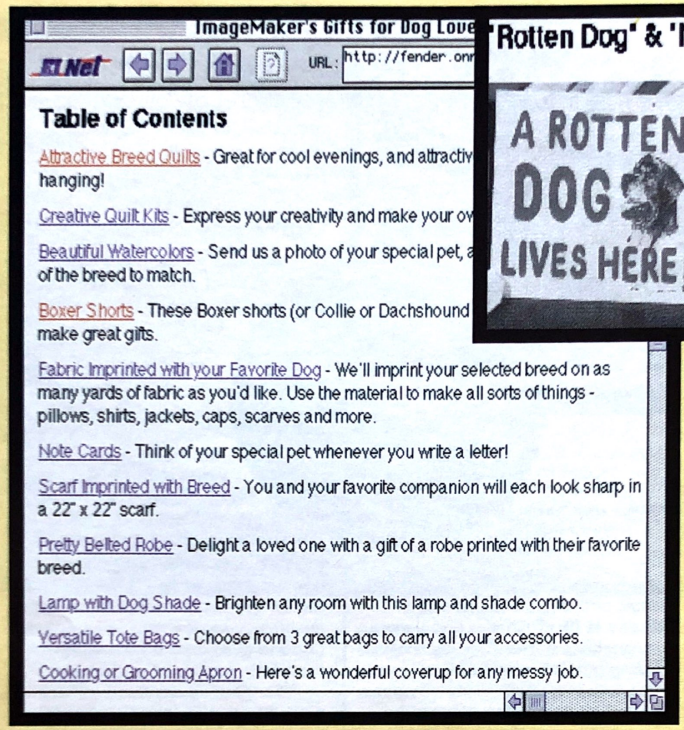
Name: Woodstock
What is it? Created live during the recent Woodstock festival.
Where you'll find it:
http://www.well.com/woodstock/
What's it like? Provides links to Well conferences about Woodstock2 and other related issues, thus providing a vaguely interesting social picture of a much-hyped event. Many images are taken live from on-site, and there's an interesting account of running an Internet hook-up from a muddy field.
Upside: It's fresh, live and inventive. And there's a picture of a naked man here too.
Downside: Did you miss all that coverage in the papers, on the TV and in the Sunday mags? Do you really want to see it all again?
Bizarre rating: 3
Overall: ★★

Don't pay the piper

Name: Ain't Whistlin' Dixie
What is it? The Internet's first on-line downloadable album, brought to you by David Walker, an amateur musician and member of Blackthorn, Orange County, California's premier Irish folk band.
Where you'll find it:
http://mothra.nts.uci.edu:80/~dhwalker/dixie/
What's it like? The album or the Web page? The latter is well laid out, with titles and descriptions of all the songs next to neat buttons which enable you to download a sample (around 30K) before you plump for the whole tune.

Songs are available in either high-quality AIFF format (a typical song is 3Mb long) or lower quality AU format (typically 1Mb). To top it all, there's a picture of Cricket, David Walker's poodle.

The album, however, isn't as good, being a collection of 12 tunes tootled on the penny whistle and ocarina (not exactly great instruments at the best of times). Listen to a sample and you won't want to hear the whole thing. Folk staples such as *Planxty George Brabazon, The Blarney Pilgrim* and *.net's* favourite *Dennis Murphy and Riding on the Load of Hay* don't cut it.
Busy? No plans for a follow-up album in '94, but watch out for an Orange County tour just before Thanksgiving.
Upside: Demonstrates the vast potential of the Net as a distribution medium. If only Morrissey would get into this...
Downside: David Walker might have some like-minded musical friends – now that *would* be scary.
Bizarre rating: 3 (for the concept) **7** (for the music)
RL
Overall: ★



What have they got against nursery rhyme eggs anyway? As if it wasn't bad enough falling off the wall in the first place – this ovular discrimination is an absolute outrage.

Game for a laugh

Name: The Games Domain/Game Bytes
What is it? The largest collection of games-related links (more than 140) on the Internet. A one-stop-shop for all your gaming needs – mostly computer related, but many board games are catered for too. Game Bytes is an on-line games magazines featuring news, previews, reviews and tips.
Where you'll find it: http://wcl-rs.bham.ac.uk/GamesDomain http://wcl-rs.bham.ac.uk/GameBytes
What are they like? Both are excellent. The **Games Domain** is divided into categories to make it easy for you to track down what you're looking for – game-related FAQs, complete solutions for games, ftp links and software and hardware company contacts. **Game Bytes** is mainly of interest to PC gameplayers, but touches other systems as well.
Busy? Yep. Dave (the Game Domain's maintainer) on-line statistics showed an average of 225 requests per hour in August, and it's getting busier all the time.
Upside: Loads of information and Dave's always open to suggestions and requests.
Downside: There isn't one.
Bizarre rating: 0
RL
Overall: ★★★★★

Canine presents

Name: ImageMaker's Gifts for Dog Lovers
What is it? A shop where you can buy a huge variety of canine-related products (for people, naturally), from boxer shorts to lampshades. There's also a vast range of fine-quality porcelain and pottery on offer.
Where you'll find it: http://www.onramp.net/imagemaker
What's it like? The usual point-and-click interface tarted up with grey-scale pictures of the merchandise. On-line ordering by credit card is also possible.

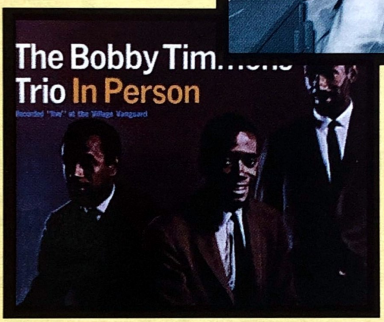
All the products have been designed by Monique Akar, a talented lady who has been painting man's best friend for 15 years – apparently, she can 'do' each and every one of all 156 dog breeds. Woof woof.
Busy? Not too sure about order levels, but new stuff is announced with monotonous regularity.
Upside: Somebody must be buying this stuff.
Downside: How about a range of products for the dogs themselves – coffins, that sort of thing?
Bizarre rating: 4
Typical quote: "Another handy sign is the 'No Humpty-Dumpty' – post it wherever you don't want any dumpings. $6.95+shipping."
RL
Overall: ★★

Worthy but dull

Name: I'M Europe
What is it? The EC's Directorate Generale XIII/E's home page – I'M stands for Information Market, in case you were wondering. DG XIII/E is making its services available to the 25 million or so Internet users and wants to play a part in transforming "a 20th century academic tool into a 21st century public and corporate multimedia network."
Where you'll find it: http://www.echo.lu/
What's it like? Packed with acronyms and abbreviations, and brimming over with essential business information for all European firms. But oh it's so *dull*...

Busy? Do you care?
Upside: If the Internet is going to realise its full potential and turn into the information superhighway, EC involvement is a must.
Downside: We can do without all this red tape and bureaucratic nonsense. The EC never does anything quickly, so how can it possibly play a part in the rapidly changing Internet?
Bizarre rating: 0
Typical quote: "DGXIII/E has decided to harness the power of this global network of networks to assist in its mission to optimise information awareness and promote the use and exploitation of information products."
RL
Overall: ★★★

jazz images galore on Ray Avery's pages. A long URL, but it's worth the trip: http://bookweb.cwis.uci.edu:8042/jazz/jazz.html.



Jazz it up

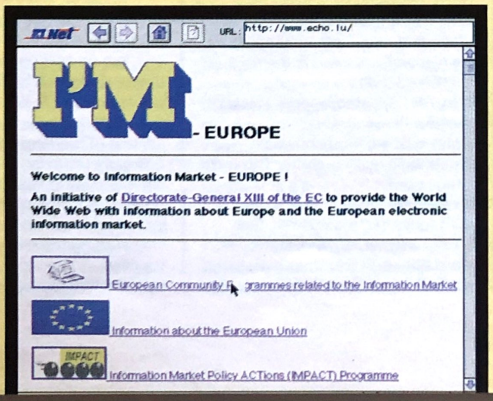
Name: The Jazz Photography Of Ray Avery
What is it? A wonderful Web site exploring '50s West Coast Jazz, through Avery's classic images, a huge discography, record covers and music samples.
Where you'll find it: http://bookweb.cwis.uci.edu: 8042/jazz/jazz.html
What's it like? Superbly presented, easy to move around and packed with information and pictures. The sound samples are of slightly poorer quality (they're all AU files), but they do provide an excellent feel for what the musicians were about.
`It's even got catalogue numbers for all the records, scans of the covers, and a bookstore from which you can order books about the period.
Busy? Yes.
Upside: A must-see site for all jazz fans, and a great browse for anyone with a passing interest.
Downside: If you're not into jazz, don't bother.
Bizarre rating: 1
RL
Overall: ★★★★★

All art is useless

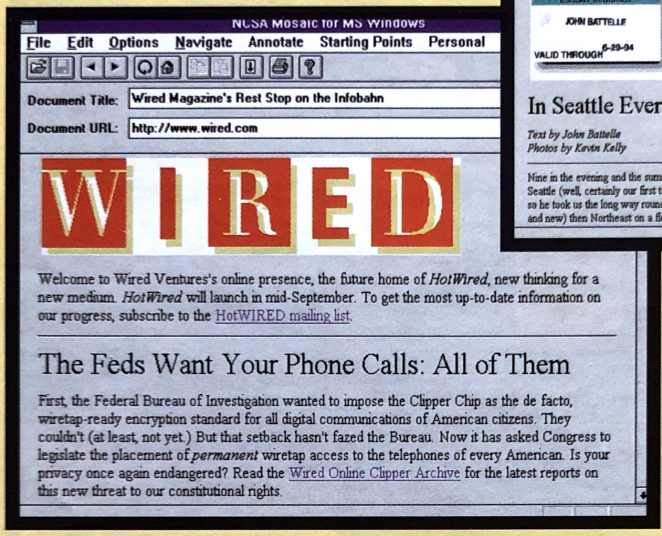
Name: Through Lover's Eyes
What is it? An on-line art exhibition showing 20 works by Linda Strauss, a real luvvie if ever there was one.
Where you'll find it: http://www.potsdam.edu/art_expo/HOMEPAG.html
What's it like? It's very much like a list of 20 pictures that you can download in JPEG or gif format, what do you expect?

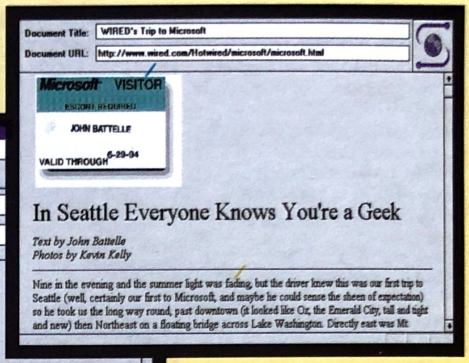
Comments from Laura and a few mini-preview pics are scattered between the wonderfully evocative names – "Garden of Earthly Delights," "Light Fingers, Leaden Dreams" and "Treescape with Heart." Most are moody autumnal scenes.
Busy? No problems getting on, but be prepared for a rather long download time if you want the whole collection – picture sizes vary between 60K and 280K for gifs; more for JEPGs.
Upside: They're genuinely good to look at.
Downside: Someone's bound to ask "What does it say to you?"
Bizarre rating: 4
Typical quote: "I watch the world through lover's eyes. I look with great affection. I see only what I want to see. This is the reality I recreate on paper. And this is what I offer you."
RL
Overall: ★★★

Take a look at the I'M site (http://www.echo.lu/) for all the latest European happenings (if you can handle the excitement, that is).



The *Wired* World Wide Web pages are starting to form a magazine in their own right – sort of like FutureNet for Californian sufer boys and their Californian surfer girls.





Wired on the Net

Name: Wired WWW Page
What is it? The World Wide Web page for *Wired* magazine, the cool US publication for computer nerds, geeks and other cool guys.
Where you'll find it: WWW: open URL to http://www.wired.com
What's it like? Way cool (as I believe they say.) Okay, it's exactly how I imagine all hypermedia should be. I found the place totally by accident. I was on **rec.games.video.arcade.collecting** (qv) and I saw this WWW address, so I called it up (it's **http://breakfast.com:2500/breakfast/it/it.html**) and discovered a page for a Boston band called Institute of Technology (which features some of their sounds...). From there I was bounced to the *Wired* site.

So what is it? Well, basically it's a support site for *Wired* magazine and has an ASCII publication of its own, called *HotWired,* which you can subscribe to for free. When I arrived there, there were two big features: one on Microsoft; the other on the new issue, which has Penn (from Penn and Teller) on the cover.

Clicking on the cover image, I brought up a full size picture, which enabled me to see the UPC Barcode in more detail. Nothing special, so afterwards I went straight for the Microsoft article.

It was about a few journalists who went to Microsoft HQ in Rainy Seattle and actually got to interview Bill Gates, Microsoft boss, king nerd and rich guy extraordinaire. I'm a big Bill fan myself, so you can imagine how ecstatic I was to come across this. Anyway, as a piece of hypermedia, the article is fantastic, containing animations (of Bill!), cross-referenced articles which you can check out at a mouse-click, and various other cute bits. Also on the site is info on subscribing to *Wired,* obtaining back issues, and news about their forthcoming site, where famous people will appear on the Net and you can ask them questions – live!
Busy? It's updated weekly, at least.
Upside: *Wired* is giving us a glimpse of what hypermedia really is about. This is the future, guys.
Downside: I read it all in a day. I want more! (Er, more *Wired,* that is – not a hypermedia version of *More!* Although that does have its possibilities – a World Wide Web site for the mag's "Position of the fortnight" anybody?)
Bizarre rating: 3
Typical quote: "Penn Jilette: A little girl in a fat guy's body."
SH
Overall: ★★★★★
*(Don't forget to check .net's own Web venture on **http://www.futurenet.co.uk/net.html**, folks...)*

Rule Britannia

Name: Britannica Online
What is it? 44 million words from the world's most famous and comprehensive encyclopedia, available on-line, in your living room (etc. etc.).
Where you'll find it: http://www.eb.com/
What's it like? It's bigger than the biggest thing you can think of. A virtual encyclopedia on-screen, with hypertext links to related areas in the resource. The only problem is you can only really sample the encyclopedia rather than use it fully because Britannica Online is a commercial subscription service. A bit like a more cerebral BSkyB.

However, there is a demo area where you can get a taste of what the full service is like. This is linear at first, but enables you to see how a simple search can expand into a whole range of hypertext-related links. The database also contains the full text of Merriam-Webster's *Collegiate Dictionary* and the *Britannica Book of the Year,* among others. It's worth lobbying for individual accounts to Britannica Online using the e-mail address supplied.
Upside: One of the world's most

comprehensive references available on-line.
Downside: It's a subscription service for colleges or universities only at the moment, although there are plans to offer the service to other businesses, libraries and private individuals.
Bizarre rating: 0
CP
Overall: ★★★

More drugs?

Name: Commonwealth Games 1994 info server.
What is it? A World Wide Web page with lots of info about the Victoria Games. And no pictures of Linford Christie's lunchbox.
Where you'll find it: Simply open a URL to: http://www.cg94.freenet.victoria.bc.ca
What's it like? Statto fom *Fantasy Football League* would love this place. It's full of, er, 'interesting' information about the recent Commonwealth Games. If you can think of it, there'll be a statistic for it, and if there's a statistic for it, it'll be here. As well as info about the Games, there's also a link to the Victoria info server which tells you everything you wanted to know about the wonderful city of Victoria.
Busy: No. There's not much to update – the Games finished a few months ago, after all.
Upside: Such a wealth of statistics makes it perfect fodder for nerdy anorak types everywhere.
Downside: It could do with some more visuals. Where are the anims of our Linford doing the business, for instance?
Bizarre Rating: 2
Quote: "The winner of..." and so on and so forth.
SH
Overall: ★★★

The Stones hit the Net

Name: The Voodoo Lounge
What is it: The Rolling Stones official WWW pages.
Where you'll find it: Open a super URL to http://www.stones.com
What's it like? I'm not a big Stones fan myself (okay, I like that video where they climb all over the buildings, and I love Jerry Hall as much as the next man), but this site does offer a lot. As well as the discographies, biographies and other obligatory stuff, there are tour reports and photos from fans, lists of tour dates, and one quite fascinating piece of information – apparently one of the Stones' concerts is going to be broadcast live over the Net this Autumn.

It's a neat idea, and something that'll probably be hailed as 'the new standard for video-on-demand' – maybe. Unfortunately, to listen in you're going to need a Sun SPARC Station, a lot of software and a fat Internet connection. In other words, if you're using a service provider like Demon or CIX, you won't be watching. (Probably the only people in the UK who'll be able to receive the thing will be students, in fact.) Look for a full review in next month's issue.
Busy?: I think so. There have been an awful number of callers logged on their counters (nigh on 43,000 at the last count).
Upside: Lots of information for Stones fans.
Downside: There are annoying big mouths wherever you look.
Bizarre rating: 6
Quote: "Welcome to the Voodoo Lounge!"
SH
Overall: ★★★

Poor old George, he was such a faithful companion. Some snaps of the much-mourned canine from http://www-swiss.ai.mit.edu/samantha/travels-with-samantha.html

Not very foxy

Name: Travels with Samantha
What is it? An illustrated electronic novel covering Phillip Greenspun and Samantha's journey around the US following the tragic death of Phillip's dog George in 1991. Divided into chapters, it consists of more than 500K of text and over 250 high-quality photographs.
Where you'll find it: http://www-swiss.ai.mit. edu/samantha/travels-with-samantha.html
What's it like? A weird mixture of tender writing, landscape photography and pictures of women he met along the way. Most of the time it's grossly sentimental ("We've been friends ever since and he is one of the few men that I really feel comfortable touching; sitting close on my couch - hemmed in by the women - was the best time that I had that weekend"), but now and then the odd brutal moments liven it up no end ("It started with a nosebleed").
Upside: You wouldn't want to read it as the author intended, but it's so schmaltzy you can't help but chortle.
Downside: There's so much of it.
Bizarre rating: 8
Typical quotes:

From the novel:
"I'd go away on a trip or fall in love with a woman and say 'Okay, now I've recovered from George's death.' Then life would throw me a curve and my reaction revealed to me how fragile George's death had left me."

From one who liked it:
"Wonderful, wonderful, wonderful... Travels with Samantha is certainly the most rewarding, touching thing I've seen

through the Internet." **Jonathan A (Austin, Texas)**

From one who didn't like it: "You make me sound like a world-class caustic nympho bitch." **Jennifer M (Boulder, Colorado)**

RL

Overall: ★★

Do you feel lucky, chummer?

Name: Shadowrun WWW Page

What is it? Shadowrun, for the unenlightened among you, is a role-playing game set in the future, where computer hackers and magicians fight for supremacy in a *Blade Runner*-esque world. Bruce Sterling once said that the idea of blending magic and cyberpunk made him want to throw up. Me, I quite like it...

Where you'll find it: Simply open your URL to http://www.oat.ts.astro.it/marcucci/sr2/index.html

What's it like? Cool, if you happen to be a fan of Shadowrun. And it's quite cool even if you don't. Paolo Marcucci, who runs it, has done a truly excellent job, from the slick presentation to the rather nice picture of himself at the bottom of the document.

It's basically a collection of all the decent Shadowrun servers around the world, and more besides. You can go to the EFF's WWW site, check out the cyberpunk Usenet groups and even get a copy of Bruce Sterling's well-known *The Hacker Crackdown* through it too.

The Shadowrun material itself is varied – there are adventure modules, new characters to use, stories, printouts, on-line rulebooks and more. I loved the original game and this is just another reason to keep right on playing it. Indeed, if you play any kind of role-playing game you'll like this site.

Busy: Quite difficult to tell really. There's an awful lot of stuff already there, as well as plenty of work-in-progress updates.

Upside: Packed with excellent material about the game, and it very clearly benefits from the bags of dedication and skill that Marcucci's put in.

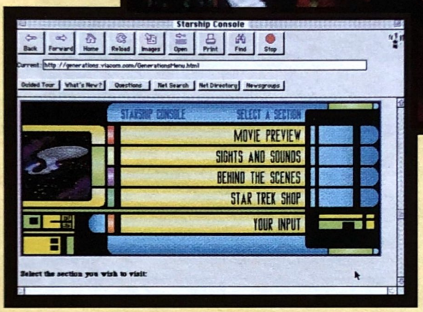
Downside: Unless you like the original, you'll find the whole thing a waste of time.

Bizarre rating: 3

SH

Overall: ★★★★★

The captains from the two *Star Trek* series get to know each other in *Generations* – and find they share an interest in horses. From http://generations .viacom.com/



The official *Generations* Web page graphics are modelled on the layout seen on the Enterprise D bridge (interestingly enough).

The next Next Generation

Name: Star Trek: Generations

What is it? An official Web page, where you can find out more about *Star Trek: Generations* (due for release in the UK in February – it's already out in the States), the new film which unites the captains of both ships in one adventure. Viacom, the company that own Paramount, has put the pages together itself.

Where you'll find it: http://generations.viacom.com/

What's it like? It's teasing, but quite good. You won't find much in here about the plot, but you will find an awful lot of background information about the film. Plus there are graphics, sound samples, and even movie clips of the cinema trailers for the film to download. (These are in AVI format for Windows, or MOV format for the Mac, and pretty huge – varying from 4Mbytes to over 12Mbytes in size.) You're probably better off downloading the graphic images and sound samples because they're a lot more manageable and much quicker to download.

Masses of general *Star Trek* information that will appeal to Trekkers, including cast biographies, *Trek* history, and filmographies of the cast and crew. You can also order *Star Trek* goodies, like the Interactive Technical Manual on CD-ROM, or download an interactive puzzle to win prizes.

Whether you're a fan of *The Next Generation* or 'classic' *Star Trek*, you'll find (lousy Trekker pun coming up) the Best of Both Worlds with this Web page.

Busy: A very high probability, Captain – the Net is absolutely crammed with Trekkers.

Upside: Stuffed with grabs, sound clips, movie clips and information.

Downside: Downloading a 12Mbyte movie file could theoretically take you all night.

Bizarre rating: 2

CP

Overall: ★★★★★ (For Trekkers)
★ (For everyone else)

The *Star Wars* Web pages are slow but worth a visit: http://bantha.pc.cc.cmu.edu:1138/SW_HOME.html – just take a look at this poster for *Return of the Jedi*. © 1976, 1994 LucasFilm Ltd.

May the Schwartz be with you

Name: *Star Wars* Multimedia WWW Archive
What is it? A mine of information about the classic space opera.
Where you'll find it: http://bantha.pc.cc.cmu.edu:1138/SW_HOME.html
What's it like? Great for finding out more about *Star Wars* in all kinds of media. Download a QuickTime clip of each of the three movies or a copy of the scripts from the film section, for instance. Summaries for the novels and spin-off books are also provided. Simply click on an icon to get more information. Other useful info about TV tie-ins and music are included, and there's a large reference area where you can obtain the undisputed facts about the *Star Wars* milieu – creatures, planets, everything...
Upside: Brilliant material for *Star Wars* fans.
Downside: QuickTime movies are ever-so slightly large.
Bizarre rating: 2
CP
Overall: ★★★★

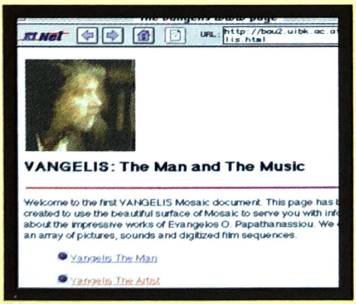
Swoony dreamboat

Name: Violet Arcana
What is it? Oh man, it's an ambient glide through the innermost depths of your mind, guided by hypnotic music and psychedelic art. And it's a Web site where Violet Arcana try to sell you their records.
Where you'll find it: http://www.tel eport.com /~arcana/
e-mail arcana@tel eport.com
What's it like? Small, but perfectly formed, with selections of music, video, pictures and record-sleeve artwork. You can download .au and .wav song samples before you order the full albums. There are also biographies, discographies, interviews, articles, reviews and links to the sort of pages Violet Arcana reckon you'll be into.
Upside: The music's actually good, and you might end up ordering a disc-load of tunes.
Downside: Some parts still under construction at the time of viewing, but the site is growing stronger.
Bizarre rating: 4
Typical quote: "Ethereal, dreamy, organic, moody, ambient, melodic, contemplative soundscapes for the surreal music listener."
RL
Overall: ★★★

Funky visuals from Violet Arcana's Web site at http://www.tel eport.com/~arcana/. Plus a man whose bouffant hairdo leaves a little to be desired.

Chariot of fire

Name: The Vangelis Home Page
What is it? A shrine to Evangelos O Papathanassiou – the man and his work. Pictures, digitised music, animations and transcriptions of interviews – as much as you could want and more besides.
Where you'll find it: http://bau2.uibk.ac.at/perki/Vangelis.html
What's it like? One of the most comprehensive musical Web sites around, covering almost everything the man has touched with his musical muse.
Busy? Is *Chariots of Fire* one of the most annoying film scores ever written?
Upside: Details on rare tracks and Vangelis' early work.
Downside: Der der der der der derrrr der. Der der der der derrrr der. And its (at times) horribly sycophantic slant.
Bizarre rating: 1 (For the really odd picture of Vangelis on the Home Page.)
Typical quote: "All I try to do is let people know what I think through my music. I just bring



Hurrah! Vangelis hits the Web at http//bau2.uibk.ac.at/perki/Vangelis.html

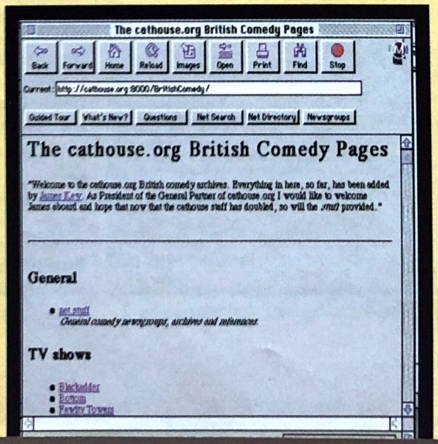
the music to you. It's up to you to do what you want with it."
RL
Overall: ★★★★

The end of the world

Name: The Alfred Wegener Institute
What is it? A Web window on the German centre for polar and marine research, which has laboratories in Bremerhaven and Potsdam, and bases in the Arctic and Antarctic. The boffins are investigating global change, holes in the ozone layer, melting ice caps, that sort of thing. Trivial stuff, really...
Where you'll find it: http://www.awi-bremerhaven.de/
What's it like? Extremely well organised, as you'd expect from a scientific centre. There's an introduction to the Institute, details of the Neumayer Antarctic Research Station, a hydrographic atlas of the southern oceans, and a database of polar and marine-related documents on offer. (Basically, more confusing graphs, charts and maps than you could go "Coo!" at).
Upside: This research is Earth-shatteringly important (literally) and it's good that the frightening results are being made available for everyone to see.
Downside: Nobody seems to care about Mother Earth.
Bizarre rating: 2
Typical quote: "Since 1992 regular ozone soundings have been performed using ECC 5A sensors mounted on RS80 radiosondes. Ozone profiles up to 35 km height were obtained about weekly. In the time – height sections from 1992 and 1993 the annual ozone variation over Neumayer is displayed. The ozone depletion – occurring during Antarctic spring – can be clearly recognised."
RL
Overall: ★★★★

Ha ha ha ha!

Name: The cathouse.org British Comedy Pages
What is it? A slowly evolving collection of pointers to Net sites relating to British Comedy. TV programmes such as *Bottom*, *Monty Python* and *Black Adder* are prominent, as are individual funsters such as Ben Elton, the late Peter Cook and Douglas Adams.
Where you'll find it: http://cathouse.org:8000/BritishComedy/

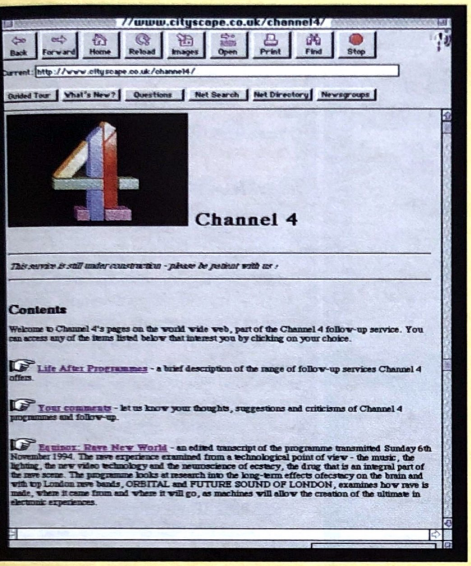


Titter ye plenty at the utterly wonderful cathouse.org British Comedy Pages. New entries are being added all the time.

What's it like? The quality of the sites pointed to vary, but the *Bottom* pages are particularly good, featuring scripts for both series, pictures and video information. A great place to start browsing for other comedy pages.
Upside: Any site with a picture of how Richie's leg got broken can't be bad. Steve Coogan's *Knowing Me, Knowing You* radio and TV shows are also featured. No sign of Newman and Baddiel (hurrah!).
Downside: Where-oh-where-oh-where is Chris Morris and Vic and Bob...
Bizarre rating: 3
RL
Overall: ★★★★

Station to station

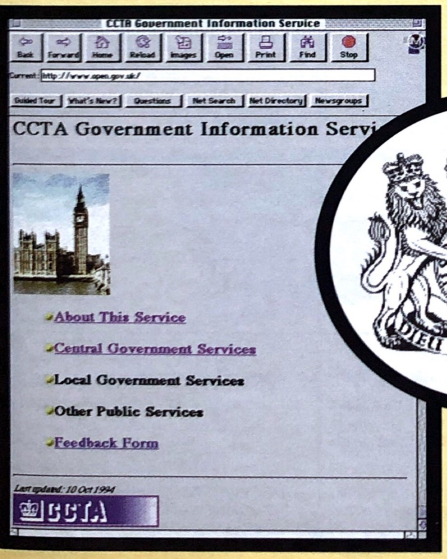
Name: Channel 4
What is it? The TV station that brought you *Brookside* and *Countdown*, and broadcast films with a red triangle in the top corner of the screen to let you know something good was coming up, now has its very own Net site.
Where you'll find it: http://www.cityscape.co.uk/channel4/
What's it like? Theres not much here as yet, although you can find the edited script for the *Equinox* programme entitled Rave New World (broadcast on November 6 1994). This linked rave culture and the Internet, and had a look at a temporary techno-hippy village, complete with a neon wicker man.
Upside: If you want more information, it's easier than rooting around for a large envelope and sending it to the address they flash up on the screen at the end. Perhaps they could do the some Web pages with red triangles?
Downside: There isn't one really, but it's too early to tell how the site's going to evolve. In the last couple of months it hasn't done much at all.
Bizarre rating: 2
Typical quote: "The rave experience examined from a technological point of view – the music, the lighting, the new video technology and the neuroscience of ecstacy, the drug that is an integral part of the rave scene."
RL
Overall: ★★★



Channel 4 is on the Web, but isn't doing very much with its site. Shame. So near, yet so far.

Oh brother, it's Big Brother

Name: CCTA Government Information Service
What is it? The British Government's first nervous steps on the Internet – several pages giving details of the Open Government Code of Practice, the Citizens' Charter, and the names of members of government (but thankfully no pictures). Rumour has it that the site's WebWeaver wanted to include quotes from the more prominent politicians, but true to form couldn't provide a soundbite short enough.
Where you'll find it: http://www.open.gov.uk/
What's it like? Pretty uninspiring, but it's a start. There must be so much useful and interesting information that the government could provide, but what we've got so far is limited. Strangely, the pages don't even mention what CCTA stands for (Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency), preferring instead to call it the less Big Brother-ish "Government Centre for Information Systems."
Upside: Just think of the potential – have you forgotten the number of John Major's motorway cone hotline? You can look it up on the Web. Want to know how many nights your local MP spent at the Paris Ritz? Well, so does everyone else...
Downside: Open Government, schmopen Government. If they investigate themselves behind closed doors, they're hardly likely to put anything too interesting or controversial on the Internet for the whole world to see.
Bizarre rating: 2
RL
Overall: ★★



Official info from the CCTA Government Information Service at http://www.op en.gov.uk/ Wake us up when it's over, please.

Mysterious art

Name: Enigma Home Page
What is it? A series of Web pages about the group Enigma.
Where you'll find it: http://www.hsr.no/~joarg/Enigma.html
What's it like? Well, a few commercial sites could learn a lot from this place – Warner Brothers, for one. Even though the company handles Enigma, this site blows its IUMA offering away. As with R.E.M., the task of making a cool Web site for the group has fallen to the fans, and they've done a sterling job. There are some lovely images, especially all the Enigma title bars, and plenty of info on the band is provided – biographies, pictures, discographies... You're also treated to translations of the French lyrics on the first album, which make even less sense when you know what they mean. And the enormous samples are just the icing on the cake.
Upside: Everything.
Downside: The samples are a little on the long side.
Bizarre rating: 3
SH
Overall: ★★★★

Software heaven

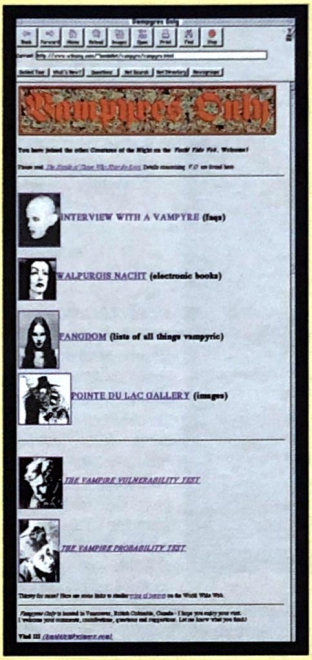
Name: The Internet goodies
What is it? A massive collection of pointers to programs for almost every conceivable (and inconceivable) computer

platform. If you know what you're looking for, you'll find a link to it here. It's not just Net software either.
Where you'll find it: http://www.ensta.fr/internet/
What's it like? Extremely well organised, with pointers to numerous sites for each piece of software. Covers UNIX, SunOS, HP-UX, Linux, DOS, Windows, OS/2, Mac and Atari, plus loads of documents.
Upside: Wonderfully comprehensive.
Downside: No Archimedes (now there's a surprise).
Bizarre rating: 1
Typical quote: "UNIX: Artificial intelligence, Computation, Databases, Games, Graphics, Sound, Utilities, Word processing, Archiving and compression tools, Communications, Programming, Shells, System administration, Text editors, Andrew User Interface System, Kerberos, Tcl/Tk, X Window System, X libraries and toolkits, Widgets, Window and session managers, Root window."
RL
Overall: ★★★★★

False teeth

Name: Vampyres Only
What is it? Weird, that's what. Everything you ever wanted to know about vampyres but were too busy watching Hammer Horror films to ask. The Abominable Dr Phibes would love this.
Where you'll find it: http://www.wimsey.com/ ~brmiddlet/ vampyre/ vampyre.html
What's it like? Very gothic, very black and white, very Bela Lugosi. Plenty of vampyric information to upset people who get worried about small children and chickens having access to anything vaguely related to the occult.

Links to electronic versions of vampyre books (including Bram Stoker's *Dracula*), an incredibly comprehensive FAQ, and some tests that enable you to work out whether you're a vampyre or not yourself. Excellent stuff.
Upside: A fascinating and lurid tip-toe through a bloodsucking gothic graveyard.
Downside: Corruption of innocent minds... Er, the Devil has all the best tunes... Er, shouldn't mess around



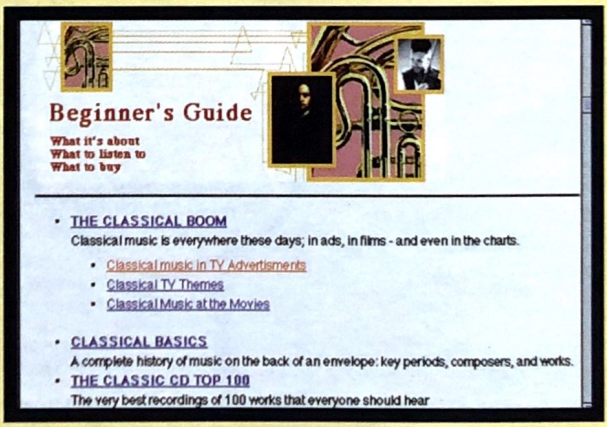
Not to be confused with the Brad Pitt/Tom Cruise spectacle, but an extremely useful resource for vampyre lovers nevertheless.

with things we don't understand... Er, impressionable youth... Er...
Bizarre rating: 7
Typical quote: Some of the issues addressed in the FAQ: "Feeding habits of vampires, Diseases linked to vampirism, Powers and limitations of vampires, The origins and causes of vampirism, The vampire in different cultures, The vampire and holy symbols, Blood types and vampires, Ricean vampires."
RL
Overall: ★★★★

Music from *Classic CD*

Name: Classic CD
What is it? The home of Future Publishing's very own high-brow classical music magazine and sizeable on-line repository of music knowledge. The Beginner's Guide to Classical Music is the main attraction, and if you ever want to find out which classical tunes accompany which television adverts, this is the place to look.
Where you'll find it: http://www.futurenet.co.uk/
What's it like? Cleanly presented, with graphics dotted hither and thither, plus a couple of fuzzy stills from TV ads.

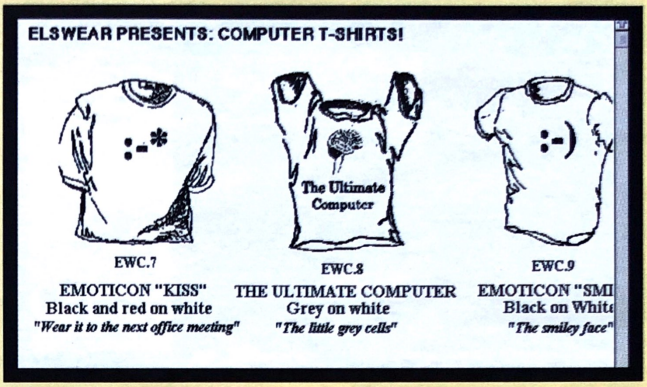
The random music list generator is quite fun – press the button and you're presented with a random list drawn from the music database. There's also a sickeningly comprehensive A-Z of composers through the ages.
Upside: Good stop-off point for music lovers. Oh, and the truly delectable Kate and Victoria.
Downside: It's all a bit *too* serious, isn't it?
Bizarre rating: 0
RL
Overall: ★★★



A campaign is all very well, but why aren't you selling the damn things?

Is that a canoe in your pocket?

Name: Codpiece International
What is it? Home of the "Bring back the codpiece" campaign and a virtual shop front for the company's (limited) range of merchandise – T-shirts from $15, boxer shorts, aprons and bumper stickers to follow. Strangely, there's no information on the availability of codpieces.
Where you'll find it: http://www.teleport.com/~codpiece/
What's it like? Cleanly presented, easy to navigate, some pictures and an on-line ordering form.
Upside: The potential for comic innuendo is vast...
Downside: But largely untapped. Not nearly enough products on offer, and where oh where oh where are the codpieces?
Bizarre rating: 6
Typical quote: "Cod piece (kod' pes), n. A prominent, embellished cup worn on the front of men's breeches throughout the 15th and 16th centuries. Sizes ranged from small pouches to large, padded, vertical, crescent-shaped protuberances, exaggerating the size of the male organ. Also used to carry small coins and the family jewels."
RL
Overall: ★★



Oh God

Name: Biblical Contradictions
What is it? 150-something apparent contradictions in the Bible, each and every one rebutted by three devout Christians. It is based on a document that was posted to the soc.religion.christian newsgroup and hangs delicately off Andrew Tong's impressive personal pages.
Where you'll find it: http://www.ugcs.caltech.edu/~werdna/contradictions/contradictions.html
What's it like? A very long list of contradictory quotes from Matthew, Mark, Luke and John *et al,* complete with links to an on-line Bible.
Upside: Thought-provoking and intelligent – it's about time someone challenged the Christians with some decent arguments.
Downside: They've got an answer for everything.
Bizarre rating: 7
Typical quote: "Index to contradictions: 1. God is satisfied/unsatisfied with his works 2. God dwells/dwells not in chosen temples 3. God dwells in light/darkness 4. God is seen/unseen and heard/unheard..."
RL
Overall: ★★★★

Spend, spend, spend!

Name: Elswear T-shirts via the Internet
What is it? A mail order service over the Net. More virtual shopping, but with real money.
Where you'll find it: http://branch.com/shirts/shirts.html
What's it like? Elswear is a canny

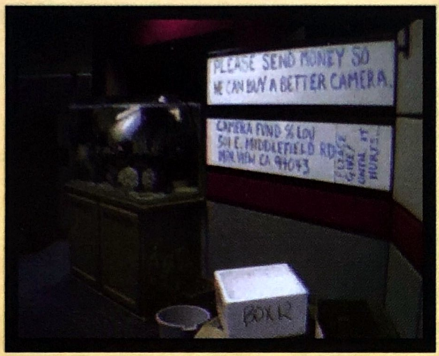
Have you got some money that you don't want? And do you need a T-shirt with a smiley on it? Well, this could be your lucky day...

company. You have all these places selling pizzas, videos, CDs and flowers – because they've all been fooled into thinking the Internet is for Everyone, and Everyone uses it – when, in fact, the majority of Net users are still people with a keen interest in computing. So Elswear, well aware of this, has produced a range of spanking T-shirts for computer people to wear instead. There's a range of cool smiley T-shirts, for example, plus a smattering of other designs.

(Just stay away from the one with the line they nicked from *Die Hard 2:* "Just the fax, Ma'am." It was funny when Bruce Willis said it, but it'll look sad on your back.) The T-shirts start at just $16 (about £10).
Upside: The T-shirts are neat.
Downside: Except for that "Just the fax" one. Sad.
Bizarre rating: 3
SH
Overall: ★★★

Fishy, fishy, fishy

Name: The fantastic FISHCAM!
What is it? A blatant waste of system resources.
Where you'll find it: http://mosaic.mcom.com/fishcam/
What's it like? Netscape Communications (the people from NCSA who decided they wanted to make pots of money from World Wide Web



There's fish in that there tank somewhere. Coming soon, the remote-control robot-arm fishing rod and deep-fat fryer.

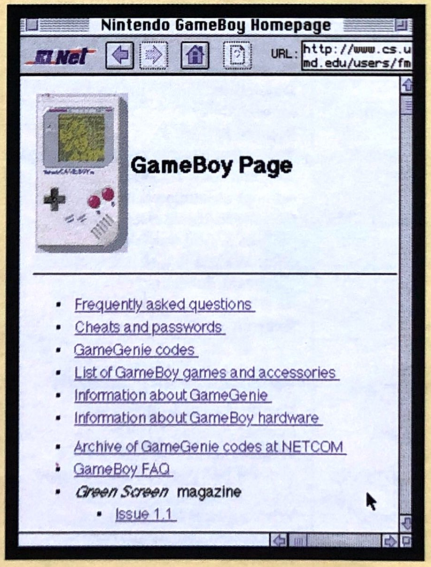
browsers) has got a Silicon Graphics Indigo workstation permanently connected to a super-expensive IndyCam that's pointing at a fishtank. Call up this site, and the SGI will grab a live image of the tank and send it to you. Great. If you had an SGI, you'd do more than video a poxy fishtank, wouldn't you? Seriously, though, it's quite decent. As well as the fishes, which are pretty difficult to make out, there are links to various fish-related sites (newsgroups, FTP sites *et al*), and there are some cool stats on the IndyCam. A bit better than the dodgy coffee machine page anyway.
Upside: It's a good example of (still) video-on-demand. Possibly.
Downside: You can hardly see the fish. There's just this big rock in an empty tank.
Bizarre: 9
SH
Overall: ★★ (★★★★ if you're a fish lover, and I don't mean the battered variety.)

Bleep, bloop – oh bugger.

Name: The GameBoy Home Page
What is it? A Home Page devoted to the GameBoy, surprisingly enough.
Where you'll find it: http://www.cs.umd/edu/users/fms/GameBoy
What's it like? The chap who put this page together is a star. He's obviously a *big* GameBoy fan. And why not? Everybody knows that Tetris has done more for the video game industry than all the interactive movies put together – it's more like a religion than an 8K Russian game about blocks.

You'll find everything you could possibly imagine about GameBoys here – and quite a few things you probably couldn't. There are reviews of loads of games, a Zelda guidebook, tips (which feature some lovely visuals), and even a particularly lavishly drawn shot of the machine's internal gubbins, together with a list of what everything does, so you can build your own. Almost.

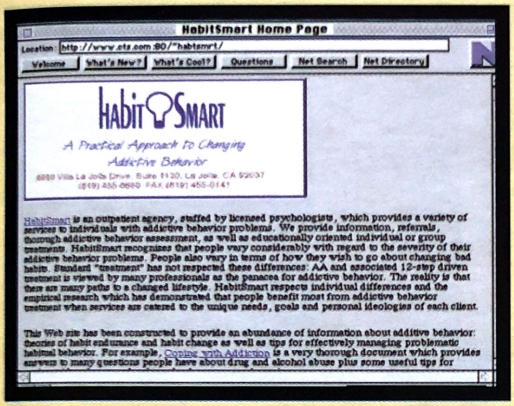
There's also a section on those dodgy Far Eastern copiers – yes, you can get them for the GameBoy, but we don't condone this activity. Oh no. Plus a section on Game Genie codes. Basically, Nintendo should sign this boy up, because he's done a better piece of promotional work for the GameBoy than Rik Mayall.
Upside: Pictures! Words! More pictures! More words!
Downside: If you haven't got a GameBoy, you're a bit scuppered.
Bizarre rating: 0
Typical quote: "To get infinite lives, press Up, Down Left, Right, A, B, A ,B and stand on your head a few times" (What happened to MERGE "" and typing 35 POKE 35899,0 (That's for Jet Set Willy on the Spectrum, in case you were wondering. And it works!)
SH
Overall: ★★★★



Just say "No"

Name: Habit Smart
What is it? A highly practical approach to changing addictive behaviour (at least that's what it says on the Web page).
Where you'll find it: http://www.cts.com:80/~habtsmrt/
What's it like? Lots of information for those who are addicted to alcohol, tobacco or food, but much of the advice is relevant for people worried about illegal substances. The site focuses mainly on alcohol abuse and smoking, with excellent advice for parents and children on how to avoid getting hooked.
Upside: Lots of anonymous information whenever you need it.
Downside: There isn't one. Unless you don't really give a stuff about your addiction.
Bizarre rating: 3
Typical quote: "The 'three Ds' can be helpful in coping with urges and craving, whether these urges are related to alcohol or drug use, overeating ,

You can probably buy watches that pack more processing power than Nintendo's handheld, so what's the enduring appeal of the GameBoy? Tetris!



If you've got a bad habit, you can learn to kick it by accessing the Web. But don't ask us what to do if you're addicted to the internet.

tobacco use or any habit you are attempting to change. The Ds stand for Decatastrophizing, Disputing expectancies and Distracting."
RL
Overall: ★★★★

A Web MUD

Name: htMUD, which one presumes stands for Hyper Text Multi User Dungeon.
What is it? A MUD on the Web. Funny thing *déjà vu*, isn't it?
Where you'll find it: http://www.elf.com/~phi/htmud.html – you'll also need an account on a MUD or MUSH somewhere else, but don't worry about that – they're ten a penny.
What's it like? It's like a MUD on the Web. Funny thing *déjà vu*, isn't it? It's an amazing idea, but this one doesn't quite work. You go through a series of welcome and instruction pages, then, once you've filled in a form with info about the MUD with which you have an account, you're placed in the first site: Limbo. Now you can wander around and generally interact with other people. There are some groovy images here – the one of Limbo and the End of the Rainbow are great, for example. It's just all a bit spartan. Metaverse, on Illuminati Online (see page 18), is better, but two words of warning before you all hop off there. First, if you have a slow connection to the Net – basically anything where you can't use graphical browsers – forget it. Call a normal MUD, instead. Second, to all you SLIPpers and students – If you're using Netscape 0.94 or higher, turn off those dodgy veiled adverts for its encryption prog that keep popping up – it'll drive you mad otherwise. An odd site, this, but worth one visit.
Upside: Visuals.
Downside: You're stuffed if you have a slow connection or no graphical capabilities.
Bizarre rating: 4
SH
Overall: ★★

Let there be money

Name: LETSystems
What is it? A new form of money to replace the tired old monetary systems that have been struggling to serve us for the last couple of centuries. The theory is that we can improve our communal lot by creating new forms of local money, and releasing ourselves from the artificial constraints of real money, which the LETSystems folk claim "isn't really real" anyway.
Where you'll find it: http://www.u-net.com/gmlets/home.html
What's it like? Very thought-provoking and interesting, but it'll take a lot of persuading before you'll be anywhere near convinced of the practicalities of the proposed system.
Upside: Depending on your point of view, this is either of potentially economy-shattering import...
Downside: Or it's just the unrealistic ramblings of some radical crackpot economists.
Bizarre rating: 8
Typical quote: "Money is just a measuring device, which we use to measure the value of our real exchanges. Why should a community be short of measures? How long would we accept a world where no houses were built for lack of inches, no beer brewed because there were no pints, no heating for the lack of degrees?"
RL
Overall: ★★★★

Official Penn and Teller

Name: Penn and Teller World Wide Web site
What is it? A Web site devoted to ***.net***'s favourite anarchists, Penn and Teller.
Where you'll find it: http://www.portal.com/~magic/PennandTeller/penn-n-teller.html
What's it like? Way back in issue one, I reviewed the newsgroup alt.fan.penn-n-teller. If you recall, it finished with a promise of a review of the upcoming Web site. And here it is – but while the newsgroup is brilliant, this site isn't. It's okay, but essentially it's just all the text files from the portal.com site with hypertext links. There's a badly scanned black and white image of Penn and Teller, and a graphical version of the pair's favourite card, the three of clubs, to use in your magic tricks. But that's it.

No spanking HTML here. Not a sausage. In fact, it's as if someone just sat down and put little pointy brackets all over the directory listing to make it Web friendly. This is a discredit to the pair and you should all boycott it. In fact, I'm so upset I'm going to do my own.
Upside: All the text files you had to obtain via FTP are now

This site just doesn't do the duo justice. A travesty of a mockery of a sham.

Web-able. Whoopee.
Downside: About as imaginative and creative as *Neighbours*.
Bizarre rating: 9
SH
Overall: ★

Unofficial Penn and Teller

Name: The decent Penn and Teller World Wide Web site
What is it? A decent Penn and Teller Web site.
Where you'll find it: http://www.aston.ac.uk/~hindlesd/penn.html
What's it like? A damn sight better than the one at portal.com – it's still not finished but I'm adding bits all the time and it will soon be a fitting testament to the magic pair.

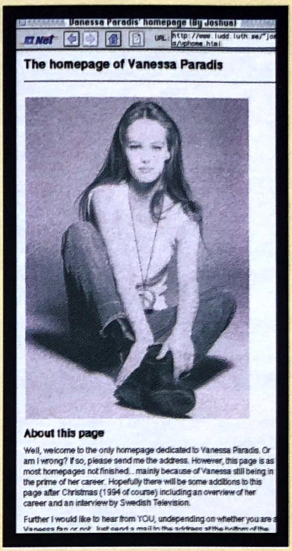
Expect to see some more cool images of the chaps, some decent text to accompany them, and an image map, if I can eventually talk Aston University's people to put some cgi-bin stuff on their server.
Upside: Better (and nearer) than the US site. Plus I made it, so it must be good – mustn't it?
Downside: The Aston newsserver still doesn't carry alt.fan.penn-n-teller – not a downside of the site itself, but a general downer nonetheless.
Bizarre rating: 2
Typical quote: "This is Simon's Penn and Teller site, and it's better than that US thing."
SH
Overall: ★★★★★
(in anticipation)

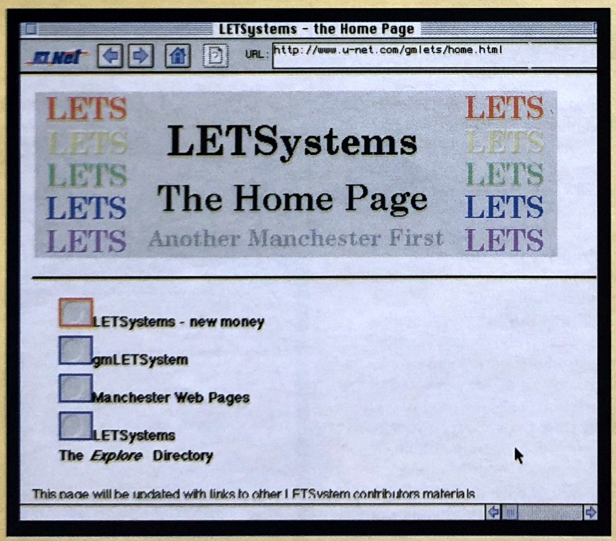
Vanessa won the hearts of many a young adolescent boy with her tear-jerking songs. It hand nothing to do with her looks at all.

Joe le Taxi!!

Name: Vanessa Paradis' Home Page
What is it? A Web site devoted to sexy French girl, Vanessa Paradis (she who was locked in that cage in the Chanel advert).
Where you'll find it: http://www.ludd.luth.se/~joshua/vphome.html
What's it like? A bit silly really – there's not much here, apart from a discography, and that's not exactly huge, is it?

Joe Le Taxi, the famous single written by Lenny Kravitz, had her moaning an awful lot (bit of wish fulfilment there, eh, Lenny?), but what else did she do? Still, there are some good pictures of the Gallic gargler in action. Oh yeah, and the words to *Joe Le Taxi*.
Upside: The Pictures! The words to *Joe Le Taxi!* No samples!
Downside: It's all over in about five minutes.
Typical quote: "Unlike Leonard Cohen's latest, you don't pick this one up to peruse the lyrics by candlelight."
SH
Overall: ★★

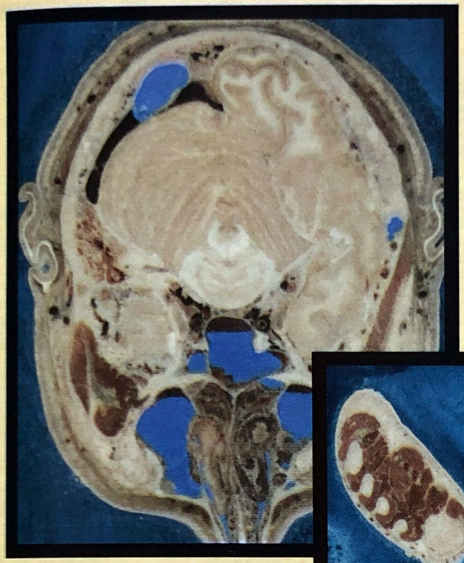


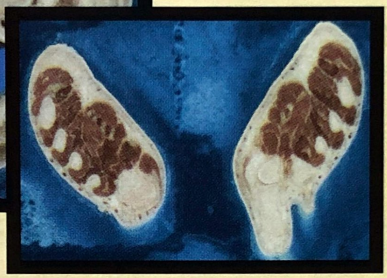


Who needs money anyway? It's all artificial, at least that's what the LETSystems people would have us believe. Wonder if they've managed to persuade their local bank managers and loan sharks yet...

Simple Simon met a...

Name: Pi
What is it? Pi to 500,000 decimal places.
Where you'll find it: http://www.enst.fr/~pauliat/pi_io.html (If you want the abbreviated version, you could look at http://cad.ucla.edu/repository/useful/PI.txt, which has Pi to a mere 100,000 decimal places.)
What's it like? Pi to 500,000 decimal places. Learn it and be really popular at parties.
Upside: It's digit-tastic, mate.
Downside: Exactly.
Bizarre rating: 9
Typical quote: "Pi = 3,14159 26535 89793 23846 26433 83279 50288 41971 69399 37510 58209 74944 59230 78164 06286 20899 86280 34825 34211 70679 82148 08651 32823 06647 09384 46095





If you ever want to look inside your body, the best thing to do is ask your GP to help you with an oily chin insertion. Slicing yourself into wafer-thin strips might cause a little irritation, especially if you have bad skin.

50582 23172 53594 08128 48111 74502 84102 70193 85211 05559 64462..." etc.
RL
Overall: ★★★★★

Now you see him

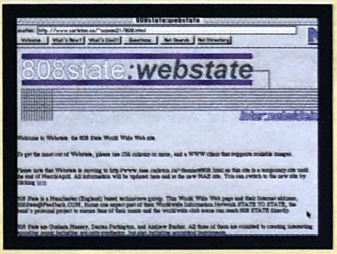
Name: The Visible Human Project
What is it? An ambitious project to create a complete, anatomically detailed, 3D representations of the male and female human bodies. Cross-section images and scans are currently being processed at one millimetre intervals. The information will be made available to health professions for education, treatment, and, of course, research.
Where you'll find it: http://www.nlm.nih.gov/extramural_research.dir /visible_human.html
What's it like? An eerily fascinating collection of pictures and scans of corpses. It is estimated that the final data set will take up around 42 gigabytes of disk space, which would occupy about 70 CD-ROMs.
Upside: If you've never seen a dead person in the flesh before, now's your chance.
Downside: The thought that you might actually *like* it...
Bizarre rating: 8
Typical quote: "The long-term goal of the Visible Human Project is to produce a system of knowledge structures that will transparently link visual knowledge forms to symbolic knowledge formats such as the names of body parts."
RL
Overall: ★★★★

Weird New Age music

Name: Windham Hill Records
What is it? A World Wide Web site belonging to Windham Hill record label.
Where you'll find it: http://www.windham.com/
What's it like? Windham Hill records started up a while ago and publishes music that's a little different from the norm – a melange of jazz/blues/classical/ world music that never fails to impress. And this site's no different. It's worth investing in one of their moody sampler CDs – they only cost a fiver. The site's also tidy, but in a stylish kind of way. A neat image map leads you into their impressive catalogue, where you can check out various artists or even listen to excerpts. This is the best part of the site, with billions of 30 second-long samples to savour. The quality is okay-ish, and you can then also order the CDs on-line.
Upside: All those samples, images, and well-laid-out pages.
Downside: Erm..
Bizarre rating: 0
Typical quote: Insert any one of a million tunes here.
SH
Overall: ★★★★

Bleep, bloop, bleep

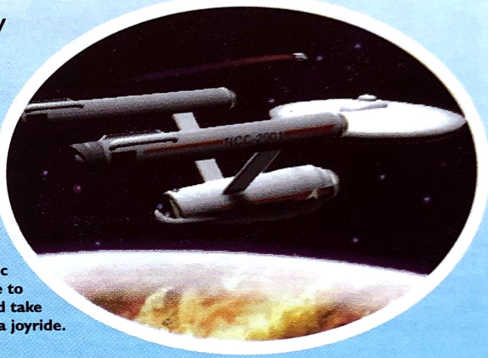
Name: 808 State Home Page
What is it? A spanking-looking page devoted to Mancunian Techno group 808 State.
Where you'll find it: http://www.carleton.ca/~ccscon21/808.html
What's it like? Extremely snappy – lovely visuals and loads of information about the group – but no samples.
There's an e-mail address, where you can reach the band, images from all their albums, a discography, but it's all a little contrived for my liking. Why exactly *aren't* there any samples? You rarely see a music site nowadays without them. It's a real pity.
Upside: The visuals; the presentation.
Downside: No samples.
Bizarre rating: 3
Typical quote: "808 State seem to be three really cool guys who are very passionate about the rave scene. They aren't 'stuck up' like other musicians. They are very approachable. "But be warned. If they start getting floods [of mail], they'll have to probably resort to using a 'robot' to reply... They are busy guys with busy lives."
SH
Overall: ★★★



808 State are rocking and rolling on in cyberspace. Well, they're mixin' and dubbin' on, or whatever it is they do.

Cyberspace, the final frontier...

Vogue said **.net** *has too many Star Trek jokes, so here are some more for old time's*



One of the new models of USS Starship that galactic boy-racers like to hot-wire and take for a joyride.

Star Trek fans are among the most enthusiastic in the world. No other TV show – *Dr Who, Brookside,* not even *Don't forget your toothbrush* – has ever embedded itself so deeply, and so permanently, in the collective psyche of so many people. It's a genuine cult.

What's more, it's a science-fiction show, which means it's the sort of thing that's going to appeal to an awful lot of computer literate Internet users. Unsurprisingly, then, the Net is literally humming with *Star Trek* chat, pictures, stories, discussion groups, sound samples, and things purporting to be the genuine leaked scripts of the next *Star Trek* movie...

You name it, it's all there for you to ogle at – if only you knew where to find it, that is. Which is where *.net* comes in...

Ah yes, I'd recognise those ears anywhere – they look much better on Kirstie Alley, though. Do you think they had to share?

"It's life, Jim, but not as we know it..."

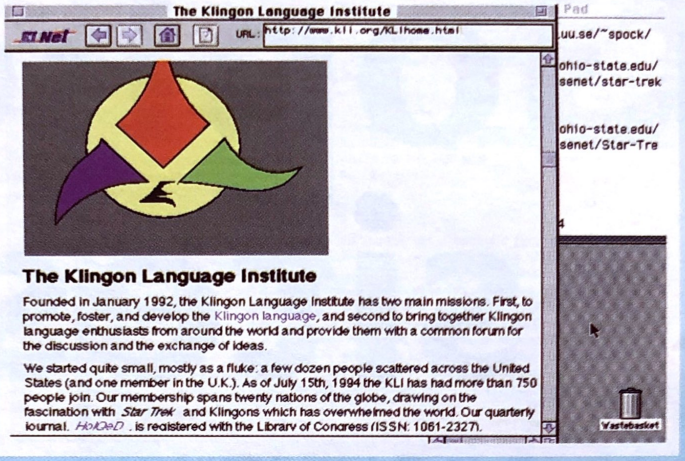
If you want to chat, discuss or argue about anything *Trek*-related then nip over to the Usenet, where there are always several hot topics under debate in the **rec.arts.startrek.current** area. The big discussion in recent weeks has been over rumours about casting for the new spin-off series starting in 1995 – *Star Trek: Voyager.*

Causing most excitement has been whether the ship will be captained by – shock! – a woman. First it was, then it wasn't, then it was again, and now latest news has it that an unknown 50ish actress has been cast. (Personally, we were hoping for the much touted ex-*Bionic Woman*, Lindsey Wagner).

Inevitably, some people take all this very seriously indeed. If you want to learn more about the technical details of 24th century technology, for instance, look at **rec.arts.startrek.tech** for debates on how transporters and food replicators would work in

the real world. You'll need a degree in physics to understand what's going on but it's definitely, er, very 'interesting reading.'

Alternatively, if you fancy Patrick Stewart you can chat to like-minded individuals in **alt.sexy.bald.captains,** and if you despise Wesley you can rage about him in the appropriately-named **alt.wesley.crusher. die.die.die.** Other popular areas are **alt.startrek, alt.startrek.creative** – where original scripts and parodies are posted – and **alt.startrek.klingon**, where you can join an estimated 250,000 fluent Klingon speakers worldwide and spout phrases like "tlhlngan Hol qun vlwan" (or "I hunt the history of the Klingon language"). Interesting.



As if struggling with GCSE French and German wasn't enough, schoolchildren can now gargle with the first interstellar language lesson thanks to the Web. There's even a newsgroup – alt.startrek.klingon – for it.

"One to beam up, Mr Scott..."

Visuals from *Star Trek* are always popular – particularly as background images on computer screens. There are several areas that provide digitised and scanned pictures, but here's a choice selection. Try **ftp://ftp.cis.ksu.edu/ pub/pictures/jpg/startrek/** for almost 400 images from the first season of *TNG (The Next Generation)* and classic TOS (The Original Series). Alternatively, do a Web search. Type in 'Star Trek' at the prompt, wait for all the Web sites to appear and start clicking.

Having a rummage through Spock's own **Vulcan Homepage** on **http://www.csd.uu.se/~spock/** is another quick and easy way to find other worthwhile *Trek* areas, including the **United Federation of Planets** home page **http://lal.cs.byu.edu/people/black/StarTrek/ufp.html** and the **Klingon Language Institute** home page at **http://www.kli.org/KLIhome.html**.

Finally, we've got a couple of gopher sites, e-mail subscription addresses and the URL of the best *Star Trek* page on the Web. Gopher to **chop.isca.uiowa.edu:8337/11/star-trek** for numerous reviews and **gopher.med.umich.edu:70/11/entertainment/sounds/startrek** for a selection of sound samples.

E-mail **listserver@le.ac.uk,** with the command 'info startrek,' to subscribe to **Engage: The European *Star Trek*** mailing list, or **trek-info-request@scam.berkeley.edui** to get the latest *Star Trek* information e-mailed to you. For the greatest Web page of *Star Trek* information, though, make sure you go to **http://www.cosy.sbg.ac.at/rec/startrek/star_trek_resources.html.**

Clive Parker

Trekkie or Trekker?

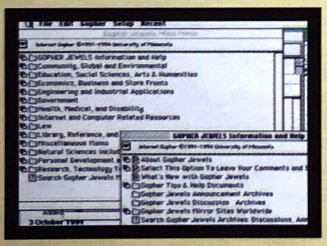
Call a fan a 'Trekker' and you'll make a friend for life. Call him/her a 'Trekkie', though, and he or she'll probably be extremely insulted. You see, after 20 odd years of quite happily calling themselves Trekkies, the *Star Trek* fan community has recently decided *en masse* that the traditional name, far from making them out to be the bright, forward-looking, free-thinking-individuals-who'd-be-welcomed-into-the-Federation that they'd like to be thought of, actually sounds rather sad. Hence the new term, Trekker, complete with macho Outward Bound connotations. So Trekker good; Trekkie bad. Now you know.

Gopher sites

Who can resist the beguiling charms of Veronica, a latter-day Joan of Arc who'll gladly sacrifice herself on the pyre of information just so you can find whatever it is you happen to be looking for? Gopher resources are many and not-very-far-between, so to sort out the wheat from the chaff, you're going to have to get to know the First Lady of Searching.

Diamonds are forever

Name: Gopher Jewels
What is it? A catalogue of gopher resources, with 2,000 pointers to reams of information that's divided into numerous subject categories.
Where you'll find it: gopher://cwis.usc.edu/Other_Gophers_and_Information_Resources/Gophers_by_Subject/Gopher_Jewels



Turbogopher's plain text exterior hides many exciting secrets.

World Wide Web: http://galaxy.einet.net/gopher/gopher.html (searchable form)

Or: http://galaxy.einet.net/GJ/index.html (traditional structure)
What's it like? It's like ferreting around in a veritable pirate's cove of gopher sites – you can stuff your virtual pockets full of gems and there'll still be enough left for another 100 trips back to the galleon. It covers everything from law and economics to personal development and recreation. Mindboggling amounts of facts, figures, features, reports, pictures and sounds are available, and it's all organised into subject areas so you can find what you're after more easily.
Busy? The Gopher Jewels software searches for broken links in the Internet chain to ensure that the best connections to all the sites are used.
Upside: Where else are you going to obtain a sound sample of a wolf howling or a program that enables your Sound Blaster to tell the time in Hebrew?
Downside: All that glisters isn't gold. What else?
Bizarre rating: 3
RL
Overall: ★★★★★

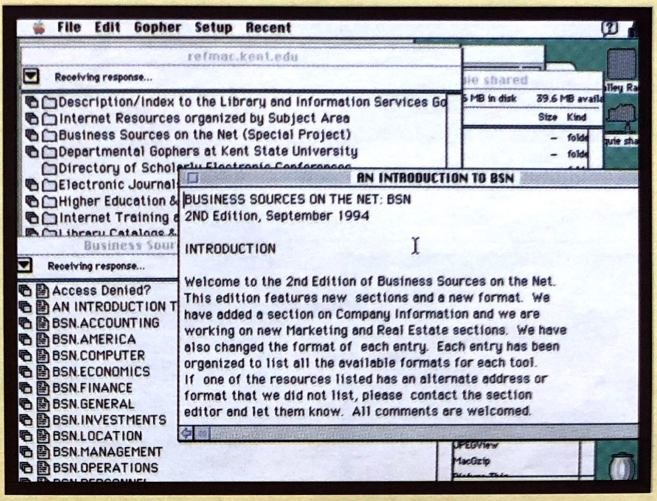
The big one

Name: Microsoft Corp. Gopher
What is it? A gopher site run by Microsoft, stuffed with files and information for developers, network administrators and PC users.
Where you'll find it: gopher://gopher.microsoft.com
What's it like? Pretty dry, but there's so much here, you don't want the info cluttered with misplaced wit. There's a huge searchable database

that should be able to answer any MS-DOS, Windows or mouse query you might have, plus there are 1,500 files in the Microsoft Software Library.
Busy? Yes, but there's usually no problem getting on.
Upside: Find the answers to your PC problems and keep all your software up-to-date with the latest bug fixes.
Downside: It's rather depressing reading all the technical info you should know about, but don't.
Bizarre rating: 0
RL
Overall: ★★★★

Do you really mean business?

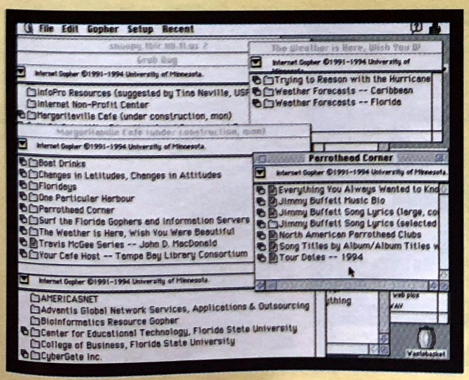
Name: Business Resources on the Net
What is it? A directory of business resources on the Net, covering economics, finance, investments, accounting, management, operations, personnel and statistics.
Where you'll find it: gopher://refmac.kent.edu/, and then select the Business Resources on the Net folder. Alternatively, ftp to KSUVXA.KENT.EDU.
What's it like? Very businesslike.
Upside: A huge number of business links to all parts of the Internet, well organised and offering fast access. Ideal for business studies students, researchers, or managers looking to get into international markets. Great for anyone who means business.
Downside: American bias.
Bizarre rating: 0
RL
Overall: ****



Business doesn't have to be boring, in fact our commercial leaders are often as interesting and dynamic as pop stars and footballers. No, really, they are.

Make it a double

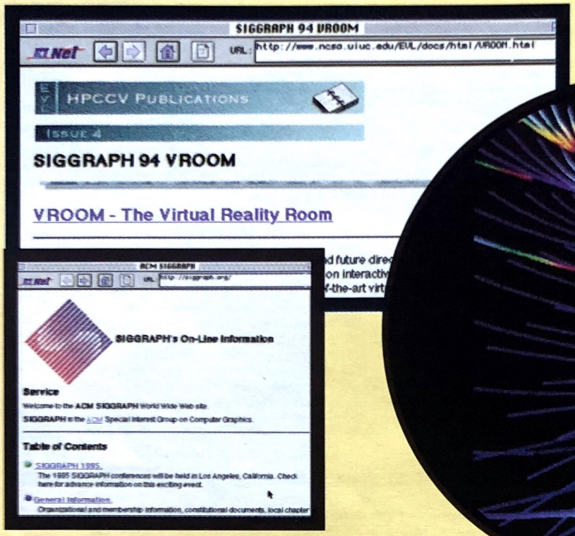
Name: Margaritaville Café
What is it? A way to visit Florida without getting shot.
Where you'll find it: gopher://snoopy.tblc.lib.fl.us/ and then head for the Margaritaville Café folder inside the Grab bag folder. Quite.
What's it like? After taking in a dose of information about world famous (?) singer-songwriter Jimmy Buffet in Parrothead Corner, wash the lot down with dozens of sunny-side-up recipes, Florida style. Florida travel information is in abundance, and there's a long list of Florida gophers and information servers. Then there's the comedy weather reports – "The Weather is Here, Wish You Were Beautiful" You've got to laugh. No, you've *got* to...
Upside: Stacks of Florida info – and anything that brings back memories of Camper Van Beethoven's *Key Lime Pie* album can't be at all bad.
Downside: If you're not going to Florida, there's not much point coming here.
Bizarre rating: 4
Typical quote: "More keylime pie recipes than you can shake a stick at! And if this list doesn't satisfy you, there are even more recipes for lime-bars, mango shakes, vodka margaritas, boat drinks, and anything else you could want to cook up!"
RL
Overall: ★★★★

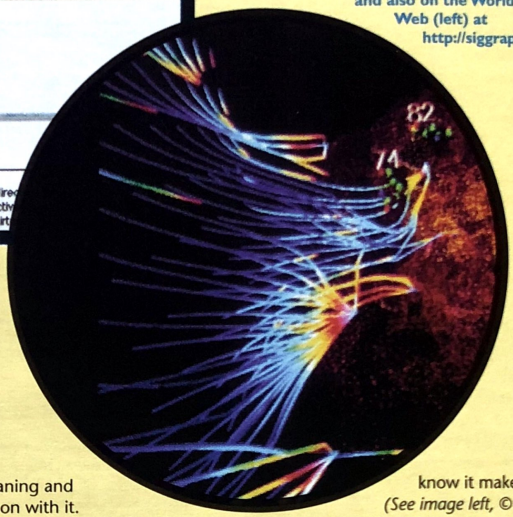


The Margaritaville Café is a great place to go to pick up some yummy recipes, but don't sleep in a freeway lay-by. Head off to gopher://snoopy.tblc.lib.fl.us/ for Jimmy Buffett lyrics and more.

Nice rendering...

Name: SIGGRAPH Info Online
What is it? SIGGRAPH is the Association for Computing Machinery's Special Interest Group on Computer Graphics. These sites provide general information about the organisation's conferences and give you access to a huge library of computer-generated art. Graphics utilities for DOS, Mac and UNIX are also available, as is a rundown on what you can





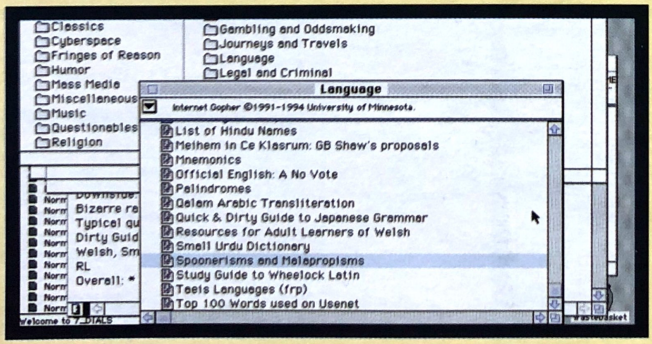
The enzyme Acetylcholinesterase (below) is one of the great images from SIGGRAPH Information Online, which is available at gopher://siggraph.org and also on the World Wide Web (left) at http://siggraph.org/

expect from SIGGRAPH in 1995.
Where you'll find it: gopher://siggraph.org or http://siggraph.org or even anonymous ftp to ftp://siggraph.org
What's it like? Great if you work in a related field or just want to see and read about the cutting edge of computer-generated graphics. Anyone who dabbles with 3D Studio should visit it as a matter of urgency.
Upside: Many of the images are truly astounding, and the pages about the conferences are extremely informative.
Downside: There's so much here it takes quite a while to find your way around, but, hey, that's part of the joy of browsing the Web, so stop moaning and get on with it.
Bizarre rating: 3 to 9 (depending on the image)
Typical quote: "Slide 74: Acetylcholinesterase: This fast-acting enzyme terminates the signal transmission between nerve cells by decomposing the neurotransmitter acetylcholine.

The unusual electric field acts like a large funnel, sucking the substrate molecule to the active site. The electric field is represented by gradient colored streamlines showing direction of the field. Specific amino acid residues are numbered and rendered as space-filled representations." Absolutely – you know it makes sense. *(See image left, © IBM Thomas J. Watson Research Centre.)*
RL
Overall: ★★★★

Mind your language

Name: Wire Tap Language Gopher
What is it? You won't learn GCSE French or German here, but you will get the hang of slang, Spoonerisms, Vietnamese computer-speak and even Welsh (but not necessarily in that order).
Where you'll find it: gopher://wiretap.spies.com/Library/Articles/Languages
What's it like? A collection of information from a variety of sources, some of it top-notch, some of it of dubious quality. Very interesting for anyone with an interest in language.
Upside: Good collection of obscure material to work your way through.
Downside: Not much of it.
Bizarre rating: 7
Typical quote: Contents include: Qalam Arabic Transliteration, Quick & Dirty Guide to Japanese Grammar, Resources for Adult Learners of Welsh, Small Urdu Dictionary, Spoonerisms and Malapropisms...
RL
Overall: ★



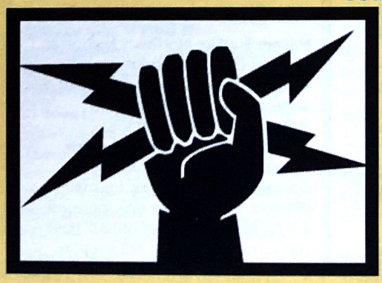
The language Gopher at gopher://wiretap.spies.com/Library/Articles/Languages won't get you a GCSE, but it will give you a pretty good laugh.

FTP sites

The joys of file transfer protocol aren't as obvious as the delights of the World Wide Web, but there's still plenty of fun to be had rooting around in other people's directories for documents, images, sound files and movie clips. There are hundreds of FTP sites to access on the Net, many containing digital information that you won't find anywhere else.

Buy CDs by Net

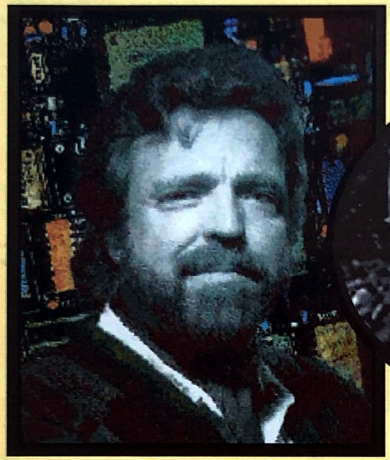
Name: CD Connection
What is it? The biggest catalogue of CDs and cassettes you'll ever come across – more than 80,000 titles – all of which you can order over the Net.
Where you'll find it: gopher: enews.com, then subfolders **Music**, **CD Connection** and then Telnet to **CD Connection** or **CD Europe**. ftp: ftp.cdconnection.com and download a catalogue.
What's it like? It's, like, amazing, man. If there's an old out-dated, delisted, back catalogue CD you can't get hold here, the chances are CD Connection will have it. Two versions are available: CD Connection in the US and CD Europe over here, although it's often easier to get onto the US end. Prod Ed Dan found (and ordered) *Ignacio*, a rare Vangelis CD, for instance (we'll let you know next month how long it took to arrive).
Busy? Yes, but you can normally get on after two or three attempts.
Upside: Reasonably cheap, depending on the CDs, but prices range from between $10 to $25 – $9 P&P for up to three CDs, and then $2 for each additional disc. You can pay by credit card or money order.
Downside: The company's entire catalogue is in a 12Mb text file and just the rock section takes up 3Mb, but you can download zipped versions.
Bizarre rating: 0
RL
Overall: ★★★★★
(★ If Dan's CD doesn't turn up)



You too can go to jail for hacking!

Name: Electronic Frontier Foundation
What is it? An ftp archive containing loads of info on hacking, phreaking, electronic terrorism and Disneyland (?)
Where you'll find it: Via anonymous ftp: ftp.eff.org

Join the EFF's campaign against Clipper and get some graphics for your desktop.



If you ever wondered what EFF Net gurus look like, here are a couple now.

What's it like then? Well, the EFF was set up in June 1990 by Mitch Kapor (ex-Lotus Baron, famous for *Lotus 1-2-3*, the world's most popular spreadsheet) and John Perry Barlow (a true cyberpunk and friend of The Grateful Dead), and is involved in asserting citizen's electronic rights. Formed in the wake of Operation Sundevil, a US Secret Service operation involving raids on various alleged hackers' houses, which later proved to have violated several laws, the EFF has been quite unfairly labelled "hacker sympathetic."

Maybe it's because they have on their system copies of practically every data magazine the hacker subculture has produced, including every single copy of *Phrack*, and a totally up-to-date collection of *Computer Underground Digests*, all of which contain juicy information on hacking, phreaking and general electronic terrorism. All for info purposes only, of course.

There are some other gems on the system, however, including various works by prominent sci-fi writers – one fine example is a strange story about Disneyland by *Neuromancer* writer William Gibson. Perhaps the site's most famous possession, though, is a complete copy of Bruce Sterling's *The Hacker Crackdown*, a book detailing the aforementioned Operation Sundevil, and available at the EFF, for free, in either ASCII or printer-friendly PostScript format! All text files are compressed using GNUZip – a cute compression utility devised by the MIT GNU team (GNU, incidentally, stands for Gnu's Not UNIX) and available at **src.doc.ic.ac.uk** (just like everything else). Telnet to the site first and search using the scanfor command if you want to get it.

Busy? Hard to tell. I've never had trouble getting on.

Upside: So much information, and although all the hacker stuff's been written by amateurs, it's an amazing and often funny read.

Downside: The files are huge, for text files *(Phrack* Issue 44 takes up 882k, compressed, for example) and it takes a while to transfer them (transatlantic lag doesn't help either).

Bizarre rating: 6 (Good job the EFF have good lawyers, or every law enforcement agency in the world would be round there.)

Typical quote: "Here's an article on how to take down the US phone network with a washing up bottle and an outboard motor..."

SH

Overall: ★★★★

SunSite

Name: SunSite Northern Europe at Imperial College, London.

What is it? A large repository of software for many formats.

Where you'll find it: Via anonymous ftp – src.doc.ic.ac.uk

What's it like then? Immense. Contains millions of files for many different formats. I've only perused the PC file areas to get an unzipper and some IRC clients, but there is support for Amiga, Mac, NeXT, Sun Boxes, UNIX servers and plenty of other machines. If you're after an IRC Client and you live anywhere in the UK, this is the place to visit.

You'll also find a mirror of the IRC archive from Berkeley University in the US here – the directory is **/computing/comms/irc/clients** – which always has plenty of material. If you're after a specific file and you're not sure of the correct directory, Telnet to the site and use the search facility. The address is the same for Telnet access. Basically, they'll have whatever you want.

Busy? It's that big, it could stop receiving new files today and you wouldn't notice for another ten years.

Upside: Those lovely transfer rates. A friend of ours claimed to have nabbed 200K/sec from the place. We, however, regularly manage 40K/sec, and reckon he's a big fibber.

Downside: Not sure. There's got to be something wrong with it...

SH

Overall: ★★★★

King of the footnotes

Name: Terry Pratchett site

What is it? An ftp site with a directory devoted to humorous fantasy writer Terry Pratchett (see page 32), one of the Internet's most famous UK-based users.

Where you'll find it: Via anonymous ftp – theory.lcs.mit.edu (Directory: /pub/pratchett

What's it like? Originally this was going to be a review of a WWW page for Pratchett, but as I was writing it the thing seemed to go missing. Instead, then, here's an associated ftp site, a mirror of the WWW one, except the .html file is compressed, so you can't http to it. Never mind, it's cool anyway. Pratchett regularly posts to his own newsgroup, and will answer mail (as long as it's not of the "Are you really Terry Pratchett?" variety), while there are gifs of all the book covers to download, plus a handful of the man himself (the one of him and his daughter shows his pretty damn impressive computer set-up too). There are loads of text files to download as well: An FAQ, lyrics to the infamous Hedgehog Song, a Discworld card game, and a near-legendary APF – Annotated Pratchett File – which contains

It is entirely possible that that's Discworld – unless you know of any other lands that are carried through space on a giant turtle.

everything you could possibly want to know about the man and his work. The WWW site, when running, presents the same stuff in a nice, friendly format. **alt.fan.pratchett**, the newsgroup, is fun too, but beware. Pratchett fans on the Net are renounced for their relentless teasing of newbies, and, as term time is now upon us, the newbie hunting season is well and truly open!
Busy? Hard to say. It's not updated all that often, but then it doesn't need to be.
Upside: The APF. Plus the pictures of the guy himself.
Downside: It's just a pity no-one's put a speech sample in there – when you listen to his voice you wonder how anyone so sweet could create Ankh-Morpork.
Bizarre rating: 2
Typical quote: [On the Mort movie] 'The American's said, 'We love it. It's great; a high concept. Just lose the death angle, guys...'"
SH
Overall: ★★★★★

Let it be

Name: Beatles archive
What is it? An archive, crammed with stuff about – yes! – the Beatles.
Where you'll find it: ftp://bobcat.bbn.com/public/beatles/
What's it like? Loads of stuff here for Beatles fans, including gifs of the album covers, copyright-free images of Paul McCartney (for his fans), and loads of text files and chat. There's even a potted history of the Rutles, aka the Prefab Four, the satirical band created by Eric Idle for the Rutland Weekend Television special.
Busy? With millions of Beatles fans worldwide, damn right it's busy.
Upside: Loads of Beatles comment, chat, information and musical discussion.
Downside: Real Beatles fans have probably seen it all before.
Bizarre rating: 2
CP
Overall: ★★★

Sci-fi addicts

Name: Science-fiction lovers
What is it? Huge site full of FAQs and info on practically every science-fiction film, TV show and book that exists.
Where you'll find it: ftp://elbereth.rutgers.edu/pub/sfl/
What's it like? Basically, a collection of text files uploaded to various Usenet newsgroups dealing with science-fiction and fantasy. There's info and FAQs on everything from alternate histories and time-lines to *The X-Files*. Almost everything is stored as plain text, so this isn't the place to visit if you're after luscious science-fiction graphics.
Busy? A very popular stopping off point for sciience fiction fans.
Upside: As much information as you can digest in a year.
Downside: No picture files.
Bizarre rating: 3
CP
Overall: ★★

CD-ROM updates

Name: Walnut Creek Software
What is it? ftp site run by Walnut Creek, containing their latest CD-ROM catalogue and updates of all their software.
Where you'll find it: ftp://ftp.cdrom.com
What's it like? It's great – and crammed with over 30 Gigabytes of PD and Shareware. It doesn't matter if you use Windows, DOS, Mac OS, UNIX, Linux, Amiga or Atari CD-ROMs either – there's software here for everyone.
Busy? So busy it's hard to connect to the site, even though up to 300 people can access the ftp server simultaneously. Like, wow.
Upside: More software than you can ever decompress.
Downside: Hard to access.
Bizarre rating: 0
CP
Overall: ★★★★

Apple's core

Name: Apple software support
What is it? Apple's own FTP site, where you can download all the latest upgrades to your Mac system software.
Where you'll find it: ftp://ftp.apple.com/
What's it like? Basically a storage area for Apple's system software going back to System 5. Even though there's loads of stuff here, including updates for the Speech Manager and system enablers, it's not much use unless you've got a connection faster than 14,400 because the files are so large. It's all very well thinking you can download the latest version of your system software, but obtaining 10Mb files using a 9,600 baud modem is no joke.
Upside: Handy if you've got a fast leased line.
Downside: Crap if you're using a SLIP connection.
CP
Overall: ★★

Telnet & IRC

Don't waste vast amounts of money running up huge phone bills on those expensive party chat lines, waste it by running up huge phone bills by dialling into Internet Relay Chat lines – you know it make sense. You can use Telnet to take instant remote control of almost any computer in the world, except perhaps some of the ones at the Pentagon.

TELNET SITES

Subway navigator

Name: Metro
What is it? A bloody useful site that enables you to check routes on subway systems around the world. You can get there by way of the gopher site or telnet direct, and choose from the following: London, Lille, Lyon, Marseille, Paris, Toulouse, Frankfurt, Munich, Athens, Milan, Amsterdam, Barcelona, Madrid, Stockholm, Vienna, Palermo, Boston, Chicago, New York, San Francisco, Washington, Montreal, Mexico, Toronto and Hong Kong.
Where you'll find it: telnet://metro.jussieu.fr: 10000/ gopher://gopher.jussieu .fr/11/metro/
What's it like? Simply enter the start and end station on the tube system of your choice to obtain that complete route. We wanted to get from Hackney Central to Leicester Square in London, for example, and the instructions given were: North London Line, Direction 'Richmond': Hackney Central; Dalston Kingsland; Canonbury; Highbury & Islington. Victoria Line, Direction 'Brixton': Highbury & Islington; King's Cross Saint Pancras. Piccadilly Line, Direction 'Rayners Lane' or 'Heathrow Terminal 4': King's Cross Saint Pancras; Russell Square; Holborn; Covent Garden; Leicester Square.

It's better advice than Ivan could give us and he lives there. And it even provides you with the estimated journey time – in this case, 30 minutes.
Upside: Simple to use and masses of quality information.
Downside: Only if the city you want isn't listed.
Bizarre rating: 1
Overall: ★★★★★

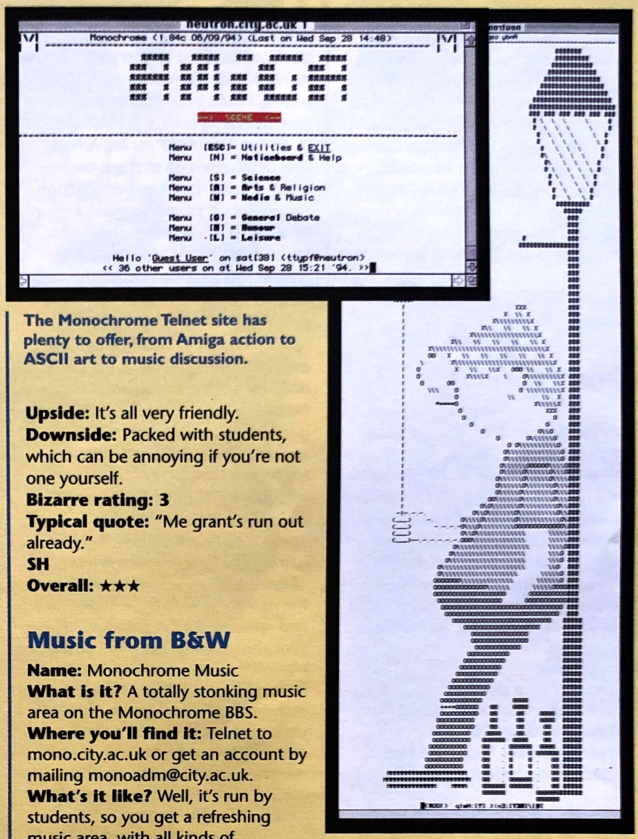
Why not just use the map on the subway wall? Or even the little one in the back of your diary?

Surf dudes ahoy!

Name: muscle.rai.kcl.ac.uk.
What is it? A nice talker.
Where you'll find it: Telnet to muscle.rai.kcl.ac.uk. The port number is 3232.
What's it like? It's a talker! If you've never seen or heard of a talker, let me elaborate. Imagine a telephone party line – they're advertised on telly late at night and have pictures of loads of people smiling and stuff. (Course, that's not what they're like at all. They're usually full of manic depressives or schizophrenics.) Anyway, a talker is virtually the same, except it's on the Internet, and there are few manic depressives. It doesn't cost a fortune to call up either.

If you think this sounds like an IRC (Internet Relay Chat) then you'd be right, but it does have a few added bonuses. With IRC you're limited in what you can do, because you only have a few simple commands at your disposal. There are so many users, and the IRC network is so huge, things have to be kept as fast and simple as possible. Talkers, on the other hand, are generally single-site, more intimate affairs – and, as such, are easier to mess about with. They have some commands that wouldn't be out of place in a MUD, for instance (like Kick, Hug, Kiss, and a few other less savoury options). Talkers also create different 'rooms' you can enter – some even enable you to create your own room which only you can enter freely and other users have to be invited into.

What's it like? Well, it's friendly, and opts for a surfer theme where all the people arrive on a beach and can then progress to various sites. Surfboards can be rented at the surf shack, but I haven't tried netsurfing with one yet. The topics of conversation vary from hour to hour, but there's quite a large student population – most of the users are UK university students skiving lectures – which might give you a clue as to what not to talk about. Grant cheques, the government and Take That are three obvious ones. If you're ever stuck, try typing ".help." There's likely to be a little OS that uses commands beginning with a full stop.
Busy: Very. It's packed with students who've just gained Internet access.



The Monochrome Telnet site has plenty to offer, from Amiga action to ASCII art to music discussion.

Upside: It's all very friendly.
Downside: Packed with students, which can be annoying if you're not one yourself.
Bizarre rating: 3
Typical quote: "Me grant's run out already."
SH
Overall: ★★★

Music from B&W

Name: Monochrome Music
What is it? A totally stonking music area on the Monochrome BBS.
Where you'll find it: Telnet to mono.city.ac.uk or get an account by mailing monoadm@city.ac.uk.
What's it like? Well, it's run by students, so you get a refreshing music area, with all kinds of alternative music catered for, and big discussions that can get more personal than those on Usenet. They also used to have what was undoubtedly the best collection of lyrics available anywhere on the Net – at one time all the REM stuff was here, for instance, *even* from when REM was on IRS, if my memory serves me well.

Unfortunately, at the time of writing, it's gone down for some reason – there might be a bit of a copyright battle going on, so don't hold your breath for its return. Apart from that slight upset, all the music areas on Mono are cool. Just press "M" from the main menu.
Upside: Completely groovy.
Downside: That text interface puts you off...
Bizarre rating: 2
SH
Overall: ★★★★★

IRC

Tupperware party online

Name: TuppNet
What is it? TuppNet offers the opportunity to participate in (horror!) Tupperware parties over the Internet. (Although this may seem hard to believe, we're not making it up.)
Where you'll find it: You can get full information from info@netcom.com; IRC Chanel: #TuppNet; IRC Server: Davis.CA.US.undernet.org 6667 You can also get a catalogue from: ftp://ftp.netcom.com:pub/tuppnet/catalog.txt
What's it like? TuppNet hold Internet Relay Chat parties every Wednesday at 6pm PDT where they show (we kid you

not) the latest Tupperware – you follow along in the catalogue, ask questions and order live on-line. Never having been to a Tupperware party ourselves, we can't vouch for the veracity of TuppNet, but you can hold your own private Tupperware parties on iRC or order by e-mail.
Upside: The ability to order, at your leisure, Tupperware from every corner of the globe.
Downside: Simple – why would you *want* to?
Bizarre rating: 9
Overall: ★

Get kicked out for free!

Name: IRC Hottub.
What is it? Dunno.
Where you'll find it: IRC: channel #hottub
What's it like then? Not a clue. The hottub came across as a cool place – it has its own Usenet newsgroup and loads of users – but when this reporter dived in he lasted about two minutes before he got kicked out. Hmm.
Busy? Very.
Upside: Not a clue.
Downside: Rude inhabitants.
Bizarre rating: 10
Typical quote: "You have been kicked from channel #hottub"
SH
Overall: Zilch for now (maybe more if they let me in!).

Poker on the Net!

Name: #Poker
What is it? A cool interactive poker game. Five card draw, nothing wild. And the sky's the limit.
Where you'll find it: IRC – Channels #poker and #poker2 (if the first one's full).
What's it like? Superb! I love poker, me. I'm crap, I admit, but I still like to play. Thing is, everyone I know wants to play for money, which usually results in me getting utterly fleeced. Up till now, I've had to resort to Anco's *Strip Poker* on my Amiga, and the women on that are crap poker players, because even though they get their kit off, winning a coup by bluffing alone is completely unsatisfying unless you're playing against real people. Imagine how my life changed when I discovered the poker channels!

The game of choice is five card draw, and the running of the game is done by a bot – a program that behaves like a user. The bot deals the game, regulates the betting, remembers the rules and compiles high-score tables.
All you have to do is sit down and play. There are some simple commands to remember. To join a game, type "p join <username> <Password>" where <username> is the name you wish to be known as and <password> is a password of your choice. (And, no, you can't be Maverick – someone else has already beaten you to it.) You'll then be included in the next game. Once your cards are dealt, the pokerbot automatically antes for you. After a round of betting, a discard phase, and another round of betting, the cards are finally revealed.

Your six main commands are: "p bet <x>" where <x> is an amount to bet, "p call" to call, "p see" to see, "p raise <x>" where <x> is an amount to raise, "p discard <x y z>" where <x y z> are the positions of the cards in your hand, numbered from one to five and "p fold" to fold. Typing "p help" will bring up a summary of commands.
Busy? There's always a game in progress, and at peak US hours you'll have to wait to play.
Upside: When you lose loads of money, it's only pretend.
Downside: When you win loads of money, it's only pretend.
Bizarre rating: 0
Typical quote: "Maverick wins with 480 in the pot! SimonH, you are bankrupt!"
SH
Overall: ★★★★

Talk to an AI now!

Name: Eliza Channel on IRC
What is it? A channel with a bot featuring the (fairly) famous Eliza AI program.
Where you'll find it: channel #eliza
What's it like? It's a good laugh. The way the program works is by building up a vocabulary for itself and working out a kind of grammar and syntax. The more real people Eliza talks to, the better she gets at talking back. Of course, she's not really talking, she's just making guesses that improve as time goes by – which makes IRC a cool place for her to hang out in because it's always being visited by droves of netters.

Once she's been up there for ages, she might even run for parliament. It's quite scary actually, talking to this program. Some of the responses are quite realistic...
Busy: I've never been on the channel with more than a couple of users.
Upside: The weird conversations.
Downside: You are only talking to a machine, and the novelty value wears off rapidly.
Bizarre: 10
Quote: "Why are you so upset, Simon?"
SH
Overall: ★★

the internet magazine
.net
The new directory to the electronic world
netmag@futurenet.co.uk
Editor – Richard Longhurst
rlonghurst@futurenet.co.uk
Cover – Jacquie Spanton
Design and work – Karl Foster

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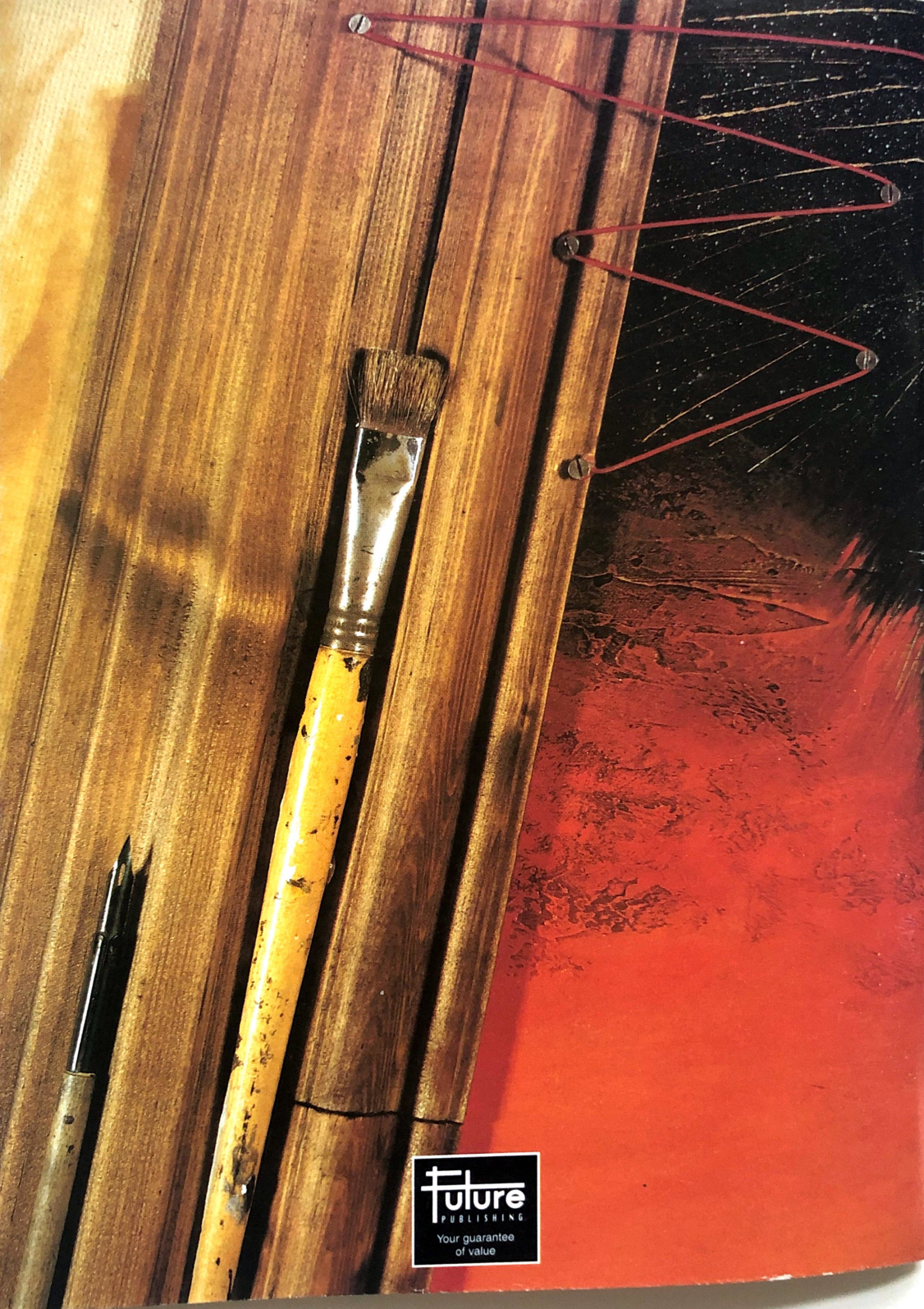

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